

GOLDEN FLEECE

HISTORICAL ADVENTURE

**MARCH
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GOLDEN FLEECE

**HISTORICAL
ADVENTURE**

20¢

MARCH

Much Lost, More Won
by H. BEDFORD-JONES

• ALL STORIES COMPLETE •

BARD OF BABYLON by A. Westcott McKee



Harold
Deloy

"The time is come, daughter; take thou
what I gavest thee. I am almost spent."

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HISTORICAL ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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Painted in oils for "Bard of Babylon" by Harold S. Delay.

These stories are fiction. If any character bears the name of a living person,
it is purely a coincidence.

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"I have come for my bride, O
King!"
"Verily thou hast the liver of a
lion!" declared Belshazzar.



Bard of Babylon.

By A. WESTCOTT McKEE

Illustrated by HAROLD S. DELAY

CHAPTER I

Ardavan Rides at Night

IT WAS the month of Tammuz, by men termed June, in the year 538 B.C. Sin, the moon god rode high in the heavens, painting the desert sands of Babylonia a mystic gray, and bringing into sharp silhouette the black tents of the Persians encamped twelve foot-hours' journey from that Lady of Kingdoms, Babylon.

Like giant dragon's teeth, sprouting through the sands, the black goat-hair tents of the army of Cyrus the Great stretched in serrated rows over acre upon acre of Babylonia's plains. All was peace and quiet. The leg-weary soldiers slept.

Before the tent of Cyrus the king,

larger, and set apart from the rest, two tired sentries made painful efforts to keep awake. Suddenly to the south came the plop of the hoofbeats of a horse driven furiously through the sand. Instantly the sentries were alert. Within a few minutes a rider on a white horse came into sight, its foam-flecked sides glistening in the moonlight.

The rider was dressed as a Babylonian archer of the cavalry. Leather trousers tucked into high laced boots were nearly obscured by a fringed tunic which he used in lieu of the coat of mail such soldiers usually wore. He drew up in a cloud of dust, and dismounted ere the panting horse came to a stop.

"Hold the steed, friend, I would speak with the king."

"Nay, not so fast, my young blood!"

retorted one of the guards, "His Highness is not to be disturbed at this hour, especially not by one in Babylonian garb." Two lances impeded further progress.

"And why not?" asked the young man, boldly walking toward the two points presented to his breast. "I am from his Royal Highness, Belshazzar."

"Thou couldst be straight from the realm of Mamyus, the evil one himself, and we would not let thee disturb the king at this hour!" stated the more stalwart of the two.

"We value our heads," added the other, "and His Majesty is right testy when disturbed of much needed rest."

"Ho, lily-livered sons of the hare," laughed the young man, "I will attend to the testiness and save thy heads at the same time!"

With cat-like speed, he plunged between the two spears, and, before the surprised guards could swing the points around in the limited space to attack, a blow to the chin of each laid them low, and the youth, grabbing up the two lances from their limp hands, quickly strode into the tent of Cyrus, The Great.

Once inside, he planted a spear on either side of the entrance, chuckled, flicked the dust from his clothes. He glanced about in the dim light cast by a wick flickering in a small oil lamp. Pieces of armor lay scattered about the tent in confusion, as if thrown off carelessly by one wearied to the point of exhaustion.

The young man lifted the lamp, took it to a couch on which lay a gray bearded man snoring lustily. The youth, his white teeth gleaming in the flickering light with a mischievous smile, maneuvered the lamp so that its light played upon the sleeping man's eyelids.

The two guards, recovered, and worriedly peeking through the tent door, made signs of amazement. Who but a god would dare thus to trifle with the mighty king? And beautiful as a god himself was the youth who stood over Cyrus. Tall, broad shouldered, narrow hipped, he was as strong and graceful as a willow on the banks of the Euphrates. His dark hair waved in glistening undulations back from a broad Greek forehead. His straight nose, well shaped lips with the humorous quirk at the corners, the firm, square chin relieved by a dimple, were the features of a Greek rather than either a Persian or a Babylonian.

Without raising his eyes from the face of the sleeping king, the young man spoke to the wondering sentinels.

"Take thy spears, O lusty ones, and may Ahura improve thy skill at arms. Stand guard lest thine heads become decorations of thine own lances. I intend the king no harm."

Aroused by both voice and light, Cyrus arose to sitting posture, yawned, spoke testily: "What now, Ardavan? Canst thou never arrive but at an unseemly hour?"

Ardavan set the light down, and the guards, reassured by Cyrus' attitude, withdrew.

The king continued: "This night I comforted myself that, for the first time in many months I could rest uninterrupted till dawn, and then thou comest with the clatter of arms and a cloud of dust." He spoke harshly, but there was a twinkle of kindness in his stern dark eyes. Ardavan had learned to disregard the tongue and read the twinkle, and took liberties accordingly. He knew Cyrus loved boldness, and, being graceful of tongue as well as of body,



he said and did things that no other in either court or camp dared.

"Nay, uncle," he chuckled as he seated himself, "I arrived in dust, true, but quietly, not with clangor of arms. Truly art thou named Cyrus the Great. Thou *art* great. Thy army is great, Thy wealth is great. Thy mercy is great—"

Cyrus made a deprecating gesture with his hand, stroked his beard, a

pleased expression wreathing his countenance.

Ardavan continued: "But these are as nothing to thy snore, *that* is indeed great. Like the stamping and champing of a thousand of Belshazzar's horses is thy—"

"Harumph! The Greek and Persian in thee is wickedly blended, Ardavan. Thy bold wit and ready tongue will sometime get thee into difficulties that

nimble heels and a swift sword arm cannot get thee out of. I suppose thou wakest me up in the middle of the night to tell me that my beard waggles when I talk?"

"Nay, uncle, I wouldn't so presume," grinned Ardavan. "I merely venture to state that thou wert drowned in thine own noise." He leaned forward and placed his hand in friendly gesture upon the king's knee.

Cyrus covered it with his own. "Thou art an impudent young hot-head, but I love thee, even as I loved thy Greek poetess mother and thy impetuous young Persian father before thee. But now tell me the news that sent thee hot haste into the night from Belshazzar's court."

"I CAME to save thee the useless sacrifice of thy daughter, the Princess Atossa, to the lust of Belshazzar. Though she will be his queen, I would not see my dear cousin enter the harem of Belshazzar, under any pretext. As thou directed, for two years have I lived at the court of Babylon's king as its poet and dance director, and I know whereof I speak. Belshazzar is brave and handsome, true, but aside from those two virtues, he is all that is vile, treacherous, cruel. I pray thee, condemn not my dear cousin to his arms."

"Methinks thou speakest from the heart regarding Atossa," commented the king slyly.

"Only as a brother would speak of his sister. Atossa loves Darius, and as for me, a maid on a roof in Babylon awaits my safe return."

"So?" remarked Cyrus. "But Atossa is already pledged to Belshazzar. An alliance by marriage is better than doubtful victory by bloodshed. Even

now we camp here awaiting her arrival from her Persian mountains."

"Yea, and even now Belshazzar awaits the coming of thee and thy daughter, and, once within the three great walls of Babylon, upon the coming of an Egyptian messenger with promise of aid from the Pharaoh, thee and Atossa will be prisoners of Belshazzar and not guests."

Cyrus leaned forward, stroked his beard thoughtfully, "How knowest thou this? I would not be wakened out of the first sweet sleep in months by mere harem gossip."

"I have no proofs. I had it from Achsah, chief concubine of the king who tires of her. She seeks revenge and—"

"By making love to thee," interrupted the king. "Beware, Ardavan, I like not harem intrigues. I would not have thy zeal as a spy lead thee to harm. Making love to a king's concubine is dangerous."

"Make love to a concubine when the fairest maid in all Babylon awaits me? I do but sing to Achsah with my harp when she is sad."

A smile softened the stern features of the king. "The danger but thickens. A woman scorned by one man is bad; by two men, is worse than a lion in the king's forest. Ardavan, thy spy days are over. Get thy accoutrements together and ride forth to-morrow to meet Atossa."

"Nay, nay, uncle," pleaded Ardavan. "I *must* go back, Zillah awaits me. 'Twas but three days ago while she walked in the gardens between the great walls of Nimitti-bel and Imgur-bel that the king espied her and spoke with her and was taken with her great beauty, and she has feared ever since, for it is well known that does a maid

find favor in the eyes of Belshazzar, he will not rest till he has her within his harem walls. And there she stays till he tires of her and hands her over to his soldiers or she is found strangled in the canal of Marduk which runneth through the city."

"And thy plan, son?"

"My plan, uncle, is to bring her and her father, Asa the healer—or Asa, the sorcerer, as he is known in Babylon because of his many cures—to thy camp and then capture the city."

"Capture the city!" The king chuckled grimly. "Thou speakest as though that were easy, to be done in a night! Did I not try for twenty months, try till my soldiers' bellies were empty of food the stubborn farmers refused to raise? Did I not try till dysentery broke out among the men and they were on the verge of revolt? And all the time, the Babylonians, with full paunches from the gardens between the walls, walked upon the ramparts and hurled obscene taunts down upon us till we were wild at our own impotence? And thou comest here and pratest of taking Babylon as I take in this fig!" He swallowed it almost whole, rubbed his arm across his lips. "Thy Greek poetry hast obscured thy Persian strategy, Ardavan."

Ardavan's face flushed angrily. He snapped to his feet. "I may have a poet's head, but I have a soldier's arm, as I will prove with any swordsman thou canst choose!" he retorted indignantly.

"Nay, nay, hothead, I meant it not unkindly. Thou didst rub me on a sore spot. It angered me that a mere beardless babe—"

Ardavan drew himself up angrily.

"Ai, Ai," continued Cyrus crossly, "I but make the matter worse. A fighting man hath no tongue craft. Say on, thou

hast a plan, or thou wouldst not have come hurtling through the night."

MOLLIFIED Ardavan reseatd himself, leaned forward. "What wouldst thou say if I told thee that Babylon could be taken in one night, and with little bloodshed?"

"I'd say thou hadst taken leave of thy senses."

The youth leaned forward, sketched in the sand at his feet. The king held the lamp and peered down intently.

"Here," said Ardavan, "lies Babylon, two monstrous rectangles on the east and west banks of the south flowing Euphrates. Here is the sixty mile outer wall of Imgur-bel, with its two hundred fifty sand-gates on all sides and the immense bronze water-gate of Illu to the north, facing the marsh of Nitocris, named from the ancient queen who built it and walled it with stone so that she could deflect the river while she tiled its banks through the city."

"Marsh?" questioned the king. "There is naught but sand and gardens to the north of the gate of Illu."

"Nay," returned Ardavan, "those gardens are over an ancient lake, tiled along its banks. I got it from the library of King Nabonidus, father of Belshazzar, whom his son keeps imprisoned within the palace. Nabonidus lives and digs among ruins and archives while his son ruins his kingdom."

"Continue!" commanded Cyrus shortly. "What has this ancient lake to do with the capture of Babylon?"

"This, my uncle. What *hath* been done *can* be done. The sand gates are too narrow for the entrance of a large army; we would be discovered before we could get enough men inside to defend themselves; but, if the great north water-gate of Illu were closed down,

followed by its sister, that of the next wall, Nimitti-bel, in six hours the river would run only hip deep within its brick tiled banks, then—"

The king, a shrewd tactician, eagerly took up the tale: "Then Darius and his army of the south could enter through the river bed, while I and my men, skirting the lake, could force two of the sand gates, enter from the west—"

"And I and my men," concluded Ardavan, "could do our part within the city itself."

"It could be done," muttered Cyrus, stroking his beard. "It could be done."

"And the time is ripe, uncle." Ardavan's dark eyes flashed with the fire of eagerness. "The city seethes with revolt. Belshazzar sits with his courtiers and concubines, drinking day and night. His only acts are those of cruelty, impaling innocent heads on spears, torturing prisoners, taxing the already over-burdened Jews. There would be thousands within the city itself to aid us. Nor is this all. On the next sunrise is the annual marriage day, when, according to custom, the dowerless maids of Babylon are brought to the mart and sold as wives to the highest bidder. The entire city celebrates; then, on the next night, Belshazzar invites the city's five hundred thousand to feast with him to commemorate thy bloodless defeat, and the departure of thy army. By that time the wine cup will prevail, there will not be a steady foot in all Babylon."

"By Ahura, a goodly scheme!" Cyrus smote his fist upon his palm. "I would like to show that blackbeard that Cyrus is not defeated, but alas, 'tis too late."

"Too late?"

"Hast thou forgotten that it is written 'Unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians'? I am a Persian

and a king. My word is given, and it is unalterable."

"But Atossa loves not Belshazzar, she weeps for Darius the Mede."

"Better the weeping of a king's daughter than the useless sacrifice of lives," said Cyrus, trying to reassure himself.

"But Belshazzar intends not to keep the agreement."

"Bring me proof of that, and within twelve hours I will be inside the gates of Babylon!"

"If there is such proof, thou shalt have it," announced Ardavan. "Now I must return to Babylon."

"Nay, thou must rest a while. Then will I get thee passage in one of the *kufas* I have been allowing to pass down the river from the north with garden truck for the feast of Belshazzar according to my agreement. Thou shalt go by horse as far as the home of Zophar the gardener, and from there make thy way within the gates disguised as a fruit peddler."

"And Zillah and her father?"

"Bring them with thee upon thy return. They shall be welcome both for thy sake and because I would have a man of Asa's skill at my own court. Now go thy way, son, but keep thine eyes and ears ever open to new developments. I shall have my army ready for the march at a moment's notice. And beware the scorned Achshah."

CHAPTER II

Ardavan Rides to Meet His Love

SHAMAS the Sun God was blessing with his dying fingers the gilded dome of the ziggurat of Bel-Marduk, holy temple where Babylon worshiped, as it towered, tier upon winding tier, like a gigantic wedding cake above its

lesser brethren. The orange light lingered on the mighty wall of Imgurbel with its watch towers at regular intervals flaunting defiance to the world from their haughty turrets three hundred feet above the plain.

Two men in a *kufa*, a skin covered, circular, basket-like boat, poled their way rapidly down the placid, chocolate colored bosom of the Euphrates toward Babylon. The younger of the two spoke: "Behold the sacred tower! See how it dwarfs its lesser brethren. Even after seeing it for the hundredth time, I marvel at the head that designed it. Babylon is indeed the most wonderful of all cities."

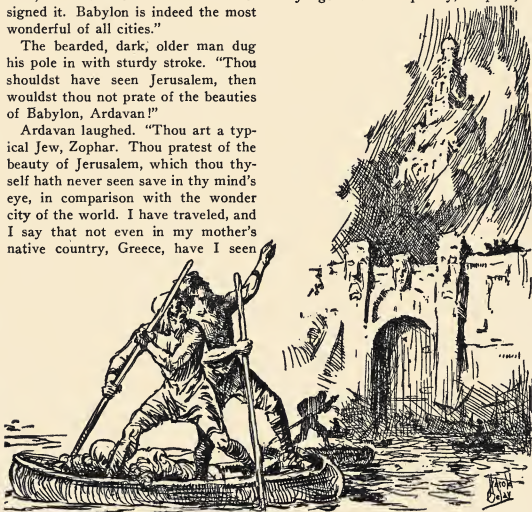
The bearded, dark, older man dug his pole in with sturdy stroke. "Thou shouldst have seen Jerusalem, then wouldst thou not prate of the beauties of Babylon, Ardavan!"

Ardavan laughed. "Thou art a typical Jew, Zophar. Thou pratest of the beauty of Jerusalem, which thou thyself hath never seen save in thy mind's eye, in comparison with the wonder city of the world. I have traveled, and I say that not even in my mother's native country, Greece, have I seen

aught to compare with yon queen of the plains, Babylon. Behold the twenty holy ziggurats lifting their gilded towers to the sky. See the mighty turrets of the outer rampart stretching toward the sun god!"

"Yea," remarked Zophar dryly, "I see them. Beautiful and strong, and as strong as beautiful. Reason enough for the withdrawal of thy Persian King. But bend thy back to the pole, O Prince, that we may make the outer water gate of Illu ere it closes at sundown."

"Judge not too quickly, Zophar,"



"Behold the sacred tower!"

Ardavan nodded his head at the *kufa* dotted waters, "Cyrus is a wily king, and I doubt not that many a Babylonish beard in yon *kufas* covers a Persian or a Jewish countenance. Cyrus has given them free passage down the river with their produce for the feast of Belshazzar. There is often deep guile behind Cyrus' simplest action."

"Thinkest thou, Ardavan, we can make it before the Gate of Illu closes down?"

"By Ahura, we've got to make it, or Belshazzar will be missing his court harpist."

"Sh! swear not by a Persian god in Babylon territory. The water hath ears."

"Thou sayest well, Zophar; however, those very ears may be our salvation. The gates may be held open an hour after sundown to let yon produce-laden *kufas* in. Dig in, Zophar, a maid awaits me on a roof in Babylon."

Zophar grinned, gave the boat a sturdy push, "And Achsah awaits thee in the garden of Belshazzar. Give me thy love philtre, O Prince, that I may find favor in the eyes of the wife I purchase in the marriage mart tomorrow."

"Sh! Heed thine own caution, Zophar. Thy voice roars like a wild bull in the king's forest. Remember, in Babylon, I am not Ardavan, Prince of Persia, but Nutimenides, the Greek poet of the palace of the king."

Zophar's chuckle shook the boat. "Ha!" he returned in a husky whisper almost as penetrating as his speech, "Small danger here, but a silver shekel against thy harp that even now, a king's concubine is anxiously awaiting thy coming."

"I have need of the harp," returned Ardavan noncommittally.

"Yea," agreed Zophar, "'tis struck with magic. No woman can withstand it. 'Tis said that Achsah, Jehovah blast her soul, sleeps not nights for languishing over thee, and now thou tell-est of a maid on a roof. Were it me, I'd be content with the fair Achsah."

"Phaugh!" returned Ardavan, spitting into the water, "Dally with a concubine when my betrothed, fairest maid of all Babylon, awaits me! I do but what duty to Cyrus demands, but I shall be glad when I need encounter the concubine no more. Besides, though Belshazzar tires of Achsah, he brooks not interference in his chosen field, and I would not have my head decorating a lance point."

"Even at that," chuckled Zophar, "'tis a sightly head, and would look better than most, and though youthful, 'tis said it contains the wisdom of Daniel. But come now, who is the maid?"

ARDAVAN grinned, laid down his pole, strummed upon an imaginary harp, and his clear, tenor voice floated over the water:

"How fair and how pleasant
art thou,

O love, for delights!

This, thy stature is like to—"

"Hist! Wouldst publish to the world that the poet Nutimenides is abroad disguised as a *kufa*-man? And now I know that thy love is a Jewish maid, for that is a song of Solomon's. But hush thy singing, there is no voice like unto thine in all Babylon."

"Thou art right, Zophar, my ardor misled me."

"Yea," conceded Zophar, "'tis ever the way of youth to twang a lyre on the beauty of his love, and in nine cases out of ten he's a greater liar than his

instrument, for love is either cross-eyed or blind as—"

"Not in this instance, Zophar, the shrewd. Everyone votes Zillah the most beautiful of the daughters of Babylon."

"Zillah, the daughter of Asa the healer?"

"Aye."

"Then Jehovah guard thee specially, O Prince, or thou art dead ere three suns. Knowest thou not that the king has had an eye upon her since he saw her walking in the garden of Nimittibel? Long ere this would he have had her were it not for her father's favor with the people and his friendship with Daniel the prophet."

"Well art thou named Zophar the chatterer," returned Ardavan. "Thou in thy wine cellars hast collected more gossip than I in my court. But never shall Zillah grace the king's harem, for, on the night of the feast, when all are wine-sogged, we make our escape to the army of Cyrus. 'Tis my reason for re-entry into Babylon. We shall need thy help."

"'Tis thine and welcome," returned Zophar. "But beware that Belshazzar strikes not first."

"Ahura be praised, he shall not!" returned Ardavan.

"Sh!" cautioned Zophar, "Swear not by the Persian god. We are approaching the great bronze water gate of Illu. We must be silent and bend to the pole."

The river Euphrates flowed on its placid, chocolate colored way toward the city. Traffic now became more congested. A forest of masts outlined their pencil points against the mighty bulwark of Imgur-bel; barges, containing cattle for Belshazzar's feast, worked their clumsy way downstream; huge rafts, loaded with bricks for which

Babylon was famous, poled their course against the current to northern marts; here and there a bireme with flashing oars swept rapidly along; thousands of *kufas*, loaded with garden produce, floated downstream toward the water-gates, immense cages of bronze hung from two towers by chains, ready, at a moment's notice, to close down and seal all ingress to the city of Belshazzar. On the left bank, a camel caravan from Egypt wended its way around to the west sand gate in Imgur-bel.

As they approached the great Gate of Illu, Ardavan gazed up at the three hundred foot wall of Imgur-bel on which a chariot drawn by four horses was making a complete turn on the house lined street that crowned the mighty battlement. Against the surface of the wall, the two-tiered bireme below was dwarfed to a mere speck upon the brick tunic of the "Lady of Kingdoms."

As they passed under the great gate of Illu, that, had it closed down upon them, would have crushed them as a foot crushes an ant, Ardavan greeted the chief gate keeper, "Lift up thy heads, O gates, may Marduk prosper the king!"

And Katsir, the gate keeper, made reply, "Which king?"

"The king."

When they came to the next two gates the greetings were the same, but, as Ardavan gave the last one, a veiled slave, who had been strolling along the quay, turned and made her way rapidly to the harem of Belshazzar, where Achshah awaited her.

CHAPTER III

In the Garden of the King

WITH a feeling of foreboding, Ardavan, or Nutimenides, as he was

known in Babylon, made his way up the Street of the Processions paralleling the river, toward the palace of the king. At the home of Katsir, the gate keeper, he had changed to the garb that showed he belonged to the musicians' guild. The harp swinging at his side also proclaimed his trade. He was a goodly sight as he strode along, and many greeted him, for was he not Nutimenides the sweet singer?

Babylon was agog with anticipation of the feast: rough men carrying torches elbowed him as they hurried past; raucous laughter from the wine cellars smote his ears, but Nutimenides heeded it not, he was chiefly concerned with his fears for Zillah's safety. He must act before the king became aware of his interest.

"Glad shall I be when we are safe at the camp of Cyrus," he thought as he ascended the broad stairway leading to the palace.

A veiled woman laid a restraining hand upon his arm. "My mistress awaits thee in the harem garden," she whispered.

"I am occupied with the business of the king," replied Nutimenides.

"Achsah commands," insisted the woman.

Nutimenides hesitated. Achsah had been the unwitting source of information before, and, though he didn't like her, he felt this was a poor time to offend her. "Lead on, I will follow," he whispered.

The woman gracefully sauntered through corridor after corridor, through the palace, around to the back where was the harem garden. Through this they passed to a vine covered arbor. Nutimenides watched carefully, he suspected a trap. Entering the arbor, the

woman motioned him to a seat. He refused.

"I have much to do in the palace. The dancing girls need rehearsal. Tell thy mistress to hasten," he commanded.

The slave stepped close, removed her veil, "Knowest me not, O Greek?" she asked softly.

It was a night of enchantment. The moon rose over Imgur-bel, a broad silver disc in a star flecked sky. Below them the broad Euphrates flashed in ever silvering ripples; night birds trilled their lullabies from the sweet smelling shrubs; fountains sent their nard scented spray dancing toward the heavens. A night for lovers, but Nutimenides shuddered.

The woman stepped still closer, he caught the fragrance of her hair. "Knowest thou me not, Ardavan, Prince of Persia?" she asked. Her voice was silkily sweet.

"Achsah!" gasped Nutimenides.

"Yes, Achsah," returned the woman, "Achsah, scorned of Belshazzar because of thee, Ardavan!"

"Ardavan?" echoed the startled man, "I am Nutimenides the Greek."

A tinkling, derisive laugh was her comment. "Not to me, O Prince. But come, why stand?" She thrust her hand within his arm, pushed him down onto the seat, sat beside him, leaned her head against his shoulder.

Ardavan was too surprised to resist. "But why art thou discredited because of me?"

Achsah laid her hand upon his own, "Because—because," she said brokenly, "must I say it, Ardavan? Can't you—"

Ardavan looked down upon her coldly, he didn't trust her. He felt his danger in the king's garden.

"Thou answerest nothing," she whis-



"Knowest me not, O Greek?" she asked softly.

pered, then, suddenly, as though impelled by an inner force, she threw her arms about his neck, "O Ardavan, Ardavan, my beloved, canst thou not see how I adore thee?"

In sudden fearful embarrassment Ardavan glanced hurriedly from side to side seeking escape. It was then he thought he heard a twig snap.

"Hist, 'tis dangerous. Dost thou want my head dripping upon a spear point?" Gently he removed her arms from his neck. He doubted not that his head was small concern to her, could she but gain her purpose, but what *was* that purpose?

Achsa sobbed softly against his shoulder, "Man of ice, does my misery strike no chord of pity in thy breast?"

"Art thou mad, child?" he cautioned,

putting his arm about her shoulders and drying her tears upon his mantle. "Thy life and mine are not worth a silver shekel should Belshazzar discover us. Hist, what is that?" He had heard nothing, but the exclamation served as an excuse to remove his arm and arise.

"My slave keeps watch. 'Twas she."

ARDAVAN resolved to have done with this love making once and for all, and trust Ahura for escape: "Though thou art beautiful as the dawn, Achsa, Ishtar has decreed that I love another, and love jumps not at one's bidding. Forget me, I pray, and forgive if I have done aught amiss."

Achsa looked up. Her eyes sparkled in the moonlight. "But a king can have many wives."

"I am not a king, and I desire but one wife."

"But thou couldst be a king, king of Babylon."

Ardavan laughed. "Belshazzar is still full of health, and Cyrus departs for Persia." Achsah's purpose was lifting its head.

"Listen," continued Achsah, "think-est thou that I have stood the king's taunts meekly without purpose in my heart? I am not a meek person. Many a king has fallen because of a woman scorned, and Belshazzar's days are numbered."

Again Ardavan chuckled. "It takes more than talk to unseat a king like Belshazzar. Has not Cyrus tried for twenty months to do that very thing?"

"Aye, but Cyrus knows not what I know."

"What knowest thou, and where gettest thou thy information?"

"From the same source that told me that thou wert a Persian spy in spite of thy Greek countenance." She arose, stepped close. "Listen, Atossa weeps in her chamber for Darius the mighty Mede; I walk in my garden and plot my freedom from Belshazzar's taunts. And thou canst, if thou wilt, deliver us both, and rescue all Babylon that groans under the yoke of the king."

"How?"

"Knowest thou that Belshazzar wives Atossa, daughter of Cyrus, merely as a blind till he can get help from the Egyptian Pharaoh?"

"Yea."

"The messenger arrived this night by caravan. The king plans audience with him soon. If the reply is favorable, the king waits but to get Cyrus and Atossa within the gates where they will be guests of the king, submerged guests, and thou knowest what the dun-

geons of Belshazzar hold. Then will Belshazzar ride out with his army and strike at the leaderless and unsuspecting Persians."

"Thy proof, Achsah, thy proof?"

Achsah's laugh rippled softly, "The proof will be in my hands within the hour. Egyptians are not as cold as thou art."

"And how can all this be circumvented?" Ardavan was all eagerness now.

"Nitocris, that ancient queen, built a great lake to the north of—"

Ardavan interrupted: "I see that thou hast been delving into the archives of Nabonidus. Thou art not the only one who has thought of that plan, but alas, 'tis too late, the word of a Persian is never broken—Atossa is pledged. Better the weeping of the king's daughter than the moaning of many widows."

"Thou art as cold as thy northern mountains, O Prince. Behold!" she threw her veil completely back. "Does the beauty that entranced a woman-jaded king kindle no spark in thy breast? I offer thee beauty, love, a kingdom, for thou standest high with thine uncle, the king, who might seat thee upon the throne of Belshazzar, and then, with me at thy side, it would be but short step to overcoming the trusting Cyrus, and thou couldst be monarch of the world! What counts a copper headed Jewess against all this?" She threw herself upon his breast, pulled his head toward her lips.

Ardavan's blood was young and hot, he was a normal youth, but he had been bred in the tradition of truth and honor. Her treachery revolted him, his blood crawled with repugnance. He flung her from him.

"Have done! Thy tongue speakest lies! Thou art filled with treachery! I

will have none of thee!" He strode down the path.

"Ardavan the incorruptible!" sneered Achsah, then her voice rose high and shrill, "Help! Help! A spy!"

Before Ardavan could draw his sword, three eunuchs, led by the chief eunuch and procurer, Musezib, were upon him.

"Make short work of him!" commanded Achsah, and triumphantly disappeared into the bushes.

ARDAVAN was young and strong, the eunuchs fat and lazy, but Ardavan was unarmed and tired from a long journey. He determined to sell his life dearly. He tensed, drew a deep breath and let fly with his fist at Musezib's chin. With a startled "Ungh" Musezib dropped into a flower bed and was still. The two others, on a crouching run, came down the narrow, shrub bordered path, one behind the other. Ardavan regained his balance, leaned forward, putting his entire weight upon his left leg, letting his right rest easily. On came the eunuchs, their knives gleaming in the moonlight. Straight and sure, Ardavan's right foot described a perfect arc and reached its goal, the foremost eunuch's belly. The kick landed with a thud as on tight leather. With a groan of pain, the eunuch sank to the ground. The third was of sterner stuff. Momentarily impeded by the body of his fellow, he stumbled over it and lunged with his knife. Ardavan felt the sharp edge graze his arm. With convulsive grasp he held the fellow to him, hoping to prevent the knife's being wielded. Body swayed against body. Finally, getting his left arm about the fellow's shoulders, Ardavan struck desperately with his right at the eunuch's face. The blow landed flush

on the nose. A groan and a spurt of blood was his reward. Again the knife swished past his arm. Again Ardavan struck, felt more blood upon his fist. They fought silently save for an occasional grunt as body heaved against body. Again and again Ardavan struck, then getting his leg between those of his adversary, he gave a mighty push and both fell, the eunuch beneath, while the knife cut a wide arc through the night and landed among the bushes. Fighting the flailing arms and legs, Ardavan delivered a mighty blow that rocked the fellow into unconsciousness. With strips torn from their garments, he bound and gagged the three men and drew them back into the bushes. Achsah was nowhere in sight. He must escape before she warned Belshazzar.

But would she? Had she herself not been engaged in too much treachery to risk informing upon others? Informing upon him would mean a counter-charge, and he felt certain that Achsah's activities would not bear the king's scrutiny. However, Achsah would find a means of revenge. He must not wait, but get Zillah and Asa out of the city this very night. He planned this as he walked quietly down the path toward the street entrance. In passing behind another small arbor, he heard voices. The language was Egyptian, which his mother had taught him in his youth. He crept near, listened.

"But thou couldst be king, Hotep, didst thou play the game as I tell thee."

"Nay, Achsah, I am but the humble messenger of the great Pharaoh. I sigh not for kingship. The average fate of kings is not pleasant. I would have only my humble home and thee, fair Achsah. I have delayed my report to the king for thee, beloved, and is this

my only reward, talk of kings and kingdoms?"

"Thy reward shall be as thou wishest, Hotep, when thou hast delivered thy message to Belshazzar. Thou hast it?"

"Yea, it is here next my skin."

"It promises help?"

"Yea."

"Give it to me. I would hold in my hand the words that will build an empire. I cannot read thy picture writing, which methinks is more difficult than our cuneiform, but it would pleasure me to know that I held a kingdom in my hand."

"Tis dangerous, my life may be forfeit, but I can deny thee nothing, beloved." There came the crackle of parchment to Ardavan's ears as the infatuated messenger obeyed her request.

Ardavan pressed closer. He must have that parchment! It would prove to Cyrus that he was right!"

"Hark! What's that?" whispered Hotep.

"Tis doubtless the eunuchs disposing of an overbold admirer who forced his way into my garden," replied Achsah.

"I must away and request audience with Belshazzar," whispered Hotep. "Let me press my lips on thine, most beautiful of women, and then away. I will meet thee here, beloved, after my audience with the king."

Ardavan could hear the final kiss, then Achsah silently stole away. She would doubtless seek to find out his fate from the eunuchs, and, upon their non-return, would search for them in the garden. He must act quickly.

As Hotep, a few seconds later, slunk out of the arbor he was met by a tall young man. "This way," said he, in

the Egyptian's own tongue. "The king awaits thee."

"How knewest thou that I was here?"

The answering blow was quick and sure, and silenced the question effectively.

Later, a young man laboriously carrying a drunken fellow over his shoulder, passed down the Street of the Processions to the south, crossed the Bridge of Nitocris and proceeded toward the house of Asa the sorcerer in the western and older section of the city.

CHAPTER IV

A Roof in Babylon

MEANWHILE, on a roof of a four storied dwelling in the southwest end of the city, sat Zillah, daughter of Asa, the healer. She plucked idly at a small harp of the lyre type which she held in her lap while a female slave waved a fan above her head to keep away the mosquitoes that infested the swamp on which Babylon was built.

Undeniably beautiful, she had copper colored hair confined by a bejeweled fillet. Oval faced, her skin was as delicate as a rose petal. Features, regular and fine cut, were dominated by large dark eyes, shaded by finely penciled brows and curling black lashes. Her mouth, red as a pomegranate blossom, was beautifully shaped, yet firm. Her chin, relieved by a dimple, endorsed the strength of the mouth. There was nothing weak in this daughter of Babylon, yet there was a sweetness and gentleness of expression that tempered the somewhat intellectual severity of her face. She arose, and going to the parapet, peered anxiously down into the street.

"Thinkest thou he will come, Adah? See, the sun sinks and he is not yet here."

"Never yet hath he failed thee," consoled the slave.

"True, but there is much at the court of Belshazzar that could befall him. These are troublous times, and my heart

"But what didst thou hear, Adah, surely there was gossip?"

"Yea, that there was." She paused, loath to begin.

"Hesitate not, Adah, I see by thy countenance that thy message is of ill report."

"Yea," sighed the slave, "Rumor says



"Thinkest thou he will come, Adah?"

trembles." She made effort to control her fear, spoke in a lighter tone, "But tell me, Adah, what learnest thou in the market place this morning?"

"I saw the river dotted with *kufas* from the north laden with garden stuff to garnish the hundreds of oxen Belshazzar is having roasted for the feast, to say nothing of the wines, apples, pears, grapes—"

that the Jews are to be heavily taxed to pay for the feast."

"Ai, ai," mourned Zillah, "Verily hath trouble fallen upon our people, but can Daniel do nothing?"

"Because of his favor with the people, Daniel is deposed from authority, Belshazzar's excuse being that he is too old to govern wisely. 'Tis also rumored that Nabonidus, father of the king, who

has so long been imprisoned within the palace, is ill."

Zillah nodded, "And now that Cyrus has departed, Belshazzar will have no check upon his lust and cruelty. Better the reign of Nabonidus, delving in his musty archives, than that of his wine-bibbing, woman-lustful son!"

"Yea," agreed Adah, "nor is that the worst: this I had straight from my lover, a Babylonian, Illi, who holds the keys of the dungeons—this morning six hundred Jews were imprisoned under the pretext that they would not worship Bel-Marduk and all their possessions seized."

"Woe is me!" mourned Zillah, pacing agitatedly back and forth beside the parapet. "And why was my father not among them?"

"Because the people love him for his many cures."

"He must flee from Babylon."

"But he will not leave his herds."

"He must do so. Ardavan shall persuade him. Why does he not come?" Again she peered down into the street, beckoned Adah. "He comes! He comes, Adah! But look, he beareth a man on his shoulders!" Breaking a flower from a vine at her elbow, she threw it down to the street below.

ARDAVAN gave his limp burden into the keeping of two slaves and mounted the outside stairway three steps at a time. "Zillah, my beloved!" he exclaimed, folding her in his arms.

"Ardavan, my Prince, thou art safe!" She hid her face upon his breast.

"For the moment, my dove." Then he related to her the happenings of the evening.

"We must go this very night," Zillah's voice trembled with anxiety.

"When the messenger fails to appear, Achsah will go to the king and—"

"Nay, I am counting upon Achsah's keeping her own counsel. She herself has been engaged in too much treason to prate to the king of others; he might ask 'What led thee to this investigation?' But the Egyptian caravan waits without the gates and tomorrow will the king send an escort for the messenger, and when he finds him not—"

"Then will he suspect treason!" interrupted the girl. "And the papyrus?"

"Here next my heart. That furnisheth another reason for haste—'tis the proof of treachery asked by my uncle King Cyrus. I must get it to him before the feast that he may get his army in readiness."

"Yea, beloved, and we must not delay, time is precious. Come, we will go to my father and thou shalt persuade him to accompany us to the court of the mighty king."

They had started toward the inner stairway when Zillah turned to her slave: "Adah, the night is young. Go find that dungeon-keeping lover of thine and tell him that whatever he can secure for thy purchase price, I will double for thy marriage dower. Since yesterday morn hast thou been a free woman. I went to a scribe and had thy freedom tablet written, for I fear for thee in these times. The tablet is in my chamber. Tomorrow must thou go to the lapidarist and have 'Slave of Zillah' stricken from thy cylinder seal."

She referred to the small cylinder of the circumference and length of two fingers which every Babylonian wore strung from his neck and engraved with his name and station.

"No, no!" cried the girl kneeling at her feet, "Let me depart with thee! I am content to be thy slave for eternity."

Gently Zillah raised her to her feet. "Thou art my friend, Adah, I love thee as a sister, for were we not infants together? But too many in the party would court suspicion. Perchance later I can send for both thee and Illi."

Ardavan pressed something into the hand of the weeping girl. "Here is some silver to swell the dower, Adah. Lovers would see the whole world in love."

To the accompaniment of Adah's choked protestations of gratitude, they descended the inner stairway to the laboratory of Asa the healer.

CHAPTER V

The Strange Light

IT WAS already dark within the narrow windowed room where Asa stood. The light from the wick in an oil lamp flickered and sent a grotesque shadow dancing on the ceiling. Asa himself stood peering intently at something in a glass, his fine, aquiline featured face tense with suppressed excitement. So intent was he upon the container that he did not turn his head at the sound of their footsteps, but announced exultantly, "It glows, by the grace of Jehovah, it glows!"

So saying he blew out the flame of the lamp and held the glass up to their view. They saw a substance different from any they had ever seen before. It shone with a pale, weird, green light. He put his finger in it, held it up. The finger gleamed through the darkness, and sent a thin vapor trailing into the air. Awed and wondering, Zillah, Ardavan and Adah pressed forward.

Asa's voice was tempered with reverence: "I sought a fever cure, and instead Jehovah sends me this!"

"But, father, what will it do? Will

it kill the fever? 'Tis but a feeble light."

"Nay, it is not for fever. I know not its use, but the Lord God will reveal its purpose. Let us kneel in thanks."

As they arose a slave entered: "Master, a Babylonian seeks thy aid. The king rode him down in the market place and he bleeds his life away."

Carefully Asa placed the glowing light container down upon a bench, turned to Adah. "Haste, girl, the bag with the herbs and knives!"

"Nay, nay, father, go not!" Zillah flung herself upon his breast. "'Tis but a trick!" Then agitatedly she related the day's happenings, prompted by both Ardavan and Adah. "And when Belshazzar misses the Egyptian," she continued breathless with worry—

"He will find him sleeping in the market place," interrupted Asa, "with a sleep that is long, but not fatal," he concluded, taking a small package and pouring out a tiny pellet. "Here, Adah, give him this with a draught of water and have him carried to the market place. As for me, I shall be with thee ere the dawn to flee to the good king Cyrus."

"I beg thee, father, heed not the call. 'Tis but to get thee out of the way that the king may take me to his harem. He covets me. I beg you, do not leave me."

"Small opposition could a man of my age offer to the king did he come to take thee. Thou art as safe without me as with me, safer in fact." He poured out two pellets into his hand. "I would not have thee in the harem of the king. Should he come, and thou be drained of hope, take one, it will put thee into as long a sleep as it hath by now the Egyptian. Should dishonor absolutely threaten thee, take the second, and in-



Awed and wondering
Zillah, Ardavan and
Adah pressed forward.

stantly dost thou depart this world. But use them only as the last resort, my child. I *must* leave thee, for the Lord's work must go on. Better my risk, than that one of Jehovah's creatures die needlessly. Should I not return, haste thee to Daniel, the prophet, who will guard thee as his own child till thy lover can claim thee. Farewell, daughter. Put thy trust in the Lord. He is mighty to save." Kissing her upon the forehead, he departed.

"Ai! Ai!" wept Zillah, her head on Ardavan's breast, "Never shall I see him more!"

"Nay, nay, quiet thy grief," consoled Ardavan. "The king's mind is on his feast. Now must I too depart, disguise me as a *kufa*-man returning on his

mule to the north. At dawn meet me at the Gate of Illu. I shall have three asses, one for each of us, and we will hasten to the camp of my uncle. Until then, the great God, whom thou termest Jehovah and we Persians Ahura, bless thee and keep thee."

"Farewell, my Prince. Jehovah be with thee," replied Zillah, trying to still her forebodings.

With many a farewell kiss and longing backward glances, Ardavan tore himself away, and Zillah was left alone in the cheerless room.

Adah entered. "'Tis a potent drug, the Egyptian sleeps."

"Come, Adah, we will to the roof to await my father. The moon shines and I can see him as he comes. Until he is

within the door, my heart will be sore afraid."

Dawn was fringing the sky with red when Zillah raised her wan face from the parapet where she had gazed anxiously down the street all night. Asa had not returned. "Come, Adah, my fears have prophesied aright, my father will not come, nor can I go with Ardavan till I know his fate. We will seek Daniel."

But ere they could reach the stairway, there came a tremendous pounding at the outer gate, and a cry, "Open in the name of the King!"

CHAPTER VI

The Marriage Mart

THE sun was already high when two *kufa*-men on asses, each leading another on which were bound *kufa* skins to take back north to Armenia to build other boats, as was the custom, rode down the Street of the Processions toward the bridge of Nitocris.

"Make haste, Zophar. Something is amiss. Either Asa has not returned, and Zillah would not leave without him, or the king has her. Else would Zillah and her father have met us at the Gate of Illu as promised. Hasten, man, hasten!"

"Hasten, Nutimenides, against this rabble?"

Zophar spoke not without reason, the streets were thronged. Their hurried progress left a wake of protests and cursings in various tongues, Chaldean, Hebrew, Aramaic, and, less often, Greek. Babylonians, with their long spade shaped beards elaborately curled and oiled after the Assyrian manner, wearing ankle-length linen robes, predominated. Next in number were those whose somber glance, and sharp, high-

bridged noses proclaimed them to be Jews; here and there veiled women with their children hurried toward the common focal point, the marriage mart at the foot of the temple of Bel-Marduk, where the dowerless maids of the city gathered to be sold as wives to the highest bidder. The marriage contract was guaranteed with the purchase, with but one exception, she who was chosen by Belshazzar to be one of his concubines.

Thus it behooved the pedestrian to hurry, in order to look over the candidates for the king's favor and place his bets early before Belshazzar arrived to open the bidding. Great was the interest and high the wagers as to who would be first on the block, for she became concubine to the king. Nor was this the sum total of the crowd's interest; frequently the present favorite came in her four wheeled coach to view her prospective rival, and plan her downfall; that is, if she were of a courageous turn of mind and did not wince under the broad witticisms of her less beautiful sisters.

"Methinks this is the largest crowd that ever greeted the Marriage Morn," commented Ardavan, goading his ass.

"'Tis the smell of the roasting pits," offered Zophar. "I doubt not that there is many a one among the five hundred thousand in this city whose belly, for the twenty months of the siege, has been glued to his backbone for want of good roast padding."

"Aye," agreed Ardavan impatiently.

Zophar sniffed: "I could partake of Belshazzar's viands myself with keenest joy did I not choke on the thought that 'tis mine own race that will doubtless pay for it. Thinkest thou our plans will succeed?"

"Sh!" cautioned Ardavan. "Remem-

ber, the siege is but four days raised, and Belshazzar still has his spies."

"They're already too drunk to tell their own names," countered Zophar. "But farewell, I turn here to follow the crowd to the marriage mart, 'tis an excellent place for whispering instructions. Also I hear there is one maid who is wondrous fair with copper colored hair."

"Copper colored, didst thou say? Copper colored? Thou stupid wit! Why toldst thou me not this ere this? 'Tis Zillah, my betrothed!" Ardavan was off the ass, had thrust its bridle rein into Zophar's hand.

"Stupid wit," echoed Zophar angrily, "dost thou expect me to be endowed with the wisdom of Ea—"

"No time for chatter!" snapped Ardavan, "do thou wait on the outskirts of the crowd. If aught happens to me, wait at the Gate of Illu till the midnight double hour, then, if I appear not, hasten to the camp of Cyrus with this, and make it ere tomorrow night and the beginning of the feast of Belshazzar or it will be too late." He thrust a package at Zophar and hurriedly threaded his way through the resisting throng.

THE ziggurat of Bel-Marduk rose tier upon tier, towering into the sky to the height of seven stories. Each tier was smaller than the one below it, till crowned by the gilded dome where the god himself was supposed to rest. Here, also, the priests of Bel-Marduk took readings from the stars.

At the foot of this temple was a huge block of marble approached by steps over which was stretched a green canopy with golden fringe to keep the already blistering sun from scorching the fair merchandise crouched around the

base. On the block, in a sort of pulpit, stood Musezib, procurer and chief eunuch to Belshazzar, who acted as auctioneer. This was his great day, even the king looked up to him. Below, on his left, was the dais of Belshazzar.

Crouched about this marble platform, in various attitudes, on tiger skin rugs, sat about a hundred young women whose future was to be decided that morning. Each awaited her fate according to her nativity. The Babylonian girls beautified themselves with the aid of bronze handmirrors, rearranged their hair and jewelry, exchanged merry persiflage with the bystanders while disposing of their thin Indian muslins to the best advantage, for Musezib had provided them with gorgeous costumes for which he would later collect twice their value from the infatuated husbands. The Jewish maidens, of whom there were many, sat in dejected attitudes, modestly trying to hide the shame of their thinly clad limbs with their long black hair.

Among these sat Zillah, daughter of Asa, harp at her side. Among her dark companions she stood out like a royal topaz. Her hair flowed in rippling, copper colored cascades over her shoulders and bosom, almost concealing the thin, delicate green robe in which Musezib had clad her. Her face, pale, pearl-tinted, had the tragedy of the ages written upon it. Her golden-brown eyes ever searched the crowd: where was Ardavan? What had happened to her father? If she could only get word to Daniel! She bowed her head upon her knees and prayed in the words of David: "Give ear unto my words, O Lord, hearken unto the voice of my cry, for unto Thee do I pray. O Lord, my God, in Thee do I put my trust."

Suddenly trumpets were heard, a

herald thrust his way through the crowd, "Make way for the King! All hail the King of Sumer and Akkad!"

The crowd surged back in a great wave, for the king had been known not to heed pedestrians in his path. What was a life or two, even two score lives, to the mighty king of Babylon?

Now came the sounds of trumpeters, men in red, followed by the reed-toned bagpipes, then twelve courtiers on richly caparisoned horses. These parted into two rows, and, down the aisle thus formed, rode Belshazzar on a coal-black charger.

Instantly all Babylon sank to its knees and touched its forehead to the ground. Cries of "Hail to the King!" arose from all sides of the kneeling throng interspersed here and there with a muffled, but derisive, "Down with the oppressor! Let the Persians take the gates!"

Save for the scowl of his beetling black brows, Belshazzar gave no sign that he had heard. He dismounted, gave the signal, and the courtiers on horseback took their stand on either side of the canopied block.

Then was noticed a four-wheeled coach, richly adorned with gilding and gay color drawn by two sleek mules. A feminine voice from the kneeling crowd commented acidly, "Ho, Achsah, of the haughty mien, unveil thy face and look upon thy successor!"

Achsah made no reply, but stepped from the chariot, and, with hands crossed on her breast, stood at the foot of the raised dais of Belshazzar.

WITH grim visage, Belshazzar stood surveying the kneeling multitude as if to pick out the malcontents. A magnificent specimen of a man, tall, broad shouldered, he appeared taller

because of the cone shaped royal tiara he wore which was slightly flattened at the top and jewel encrusted. He was clad in a close fitting robe of royal purple silk, gold embroidered and fringed, and the gems on necklet and earrings would have paid a nation's food for a year. Dark eyes glistened from beneath his black, overhanging brows, and white teeth flashed from the background of a heavy black beard cut square across the bottom and elaborately oiled and curled after the Assyrian manner. Every inch a king as to stature, it was the mouth that proclaimed the man—red, voluptuous, it nestled in the mat of his beard like a fat, red spider, alert to spring out at its prey.

"Bring on your merchandise, Musezib!" he called as he ascended the dais. "Thus doth royalty sit at the feet of beauty, eh, Achsah?" He laughed, for he was in one of his merriest and cruelest moods. Not yet would he give the rising signal. Let their backs bend and their knees grow calloused.

Achsah salaamed, said nothing, but her eyes smouldered. Had he not compelled her to come here against her will that he might witness her humiliation? Her expression boded ill for the king. Many a monarch has fallen because of a woman.

"Come, Zillah," called Musezib, "bestir thyself, thou art my choice for the first bidding."

With dignified tread, harp at her side, Zillah mounted the steps of the marriage block, turned and faced Belshazzar and the kneeling throng which had begun to shuffle in protest. She stood there, tall, slender, gazing proudly back at Belshazzar, disdaining to show shame because of her thinly draped limbs, save by the flush that



With dignified tread, harp at her side, Zillah mounted the steps of the marriage-block.

swept involuntarily under her delicate skin. Hope fled her heart. Better that Ardavan did not come, for who would dare bid against the king, even though he be Ardavan, Prince of Persia?

Admiring murmurs began to be heard from the kneeling crowd. "Daughter of Ishtar herself!" "Brilliant as the sunset!" "Breasts like twin white doves!"

One, made bold by palm wine, called, "What say, O King, is she not worth one silver talent above thy last year's purchase?"

He was a rogue after Belshazzar's own heart. "Well spoken, yokel!" he shouted. Then turned to Achsah, "Remove thy veil, fair one! Let us compare thy beauty with yon Jewish maid lest the king be cheated." He tore the

veil roughly from the face of his erstwhile favorite and compared her features with Zillah's amid the chortles of the crowd.

"How long, O King, art thou going to keep us kneeling?" asked the same sturdy voice. "My belly is so thin with siege rations that it likes not coiling up like unto the tail of a swine."

"Affairs of state prevented my remembering thy groveling attitude," chuckled Belshazzar. "Arise, O brave citizens of Babylon!" He stepped down and assisted the nearest citizen with a kick on the rump.

AT THIS instant, amid the shufflings, gruntings and stretchings of the cramped multitude, there came the cry of "Zillah! Zillah!" and a *kufa*-

man began plowing his way toward the auction block.

"Back, Nutimenides!" called Zillah, "'tis too late!"

"'Tis never too late!" chuckled Nutimenides, "I'll leave it to His Majesty!"

"Ho, Nutimenides, come forward!" commanded Belshazzar. "We missed thee at the palace. To thy poesy it now seems that thou addrest the art of disguise. Why the lowly garb?"

Ardavan sank to one knee. "As a poet, O King, I sought relaxation in the wine cellars, and awoke a river-man." He cast a glance at Achsah. Evidently she had kept her own counsel. He must make the most of it.

Achsah's face was unreadable. She stood at the king's left, hands crossed upon her breast, eyes veiled with drooping lids.

"Arise, *kufa*-man-poet," said the king. "Thou shouldst have an eye for beauty. What sayest thou, is not yon maiden worth six silver talents, one more than my purchase of last year?"

"Nay, she is not to be mentioned in the same breath with the lovely Achsah," said Ardavan with a shrug, hoping thus to mollify Achsah and protect Zillah.

"Thy wine-bibbing night hath clouded thine eyes, Nutimenides; 'tis readily seen that there is no comparison between the two. Ho!" he slapped his knee, "I have it! Thou hast served me well, O poet, and shall have fit reward. Since thou admirest the fair Achsah, and she hath eyed thee with favor, thou shalt have her as a gift, and I will pay my six talents for yon maid!"

Nutimenides' face blanched. He swallowed convulsively, then spoke bravely, "Nay, O King, I could not

deprive thee of one who loves thee so devotedly—"

The crowd pressed forward eagerly. "Achsah loves me not, nor I her. I must gain by truth what I failed to do by strategy: yon maid is my betrothed. She is the daughter of Asa, the sorcerer."

"That she is a Jewess is no argument, Poet. Where hast thou been that thou knowest not that six hundred Jews were this morning imprisoned and their goods confiscated because they refuse to worship Bel-Marduk, this girl's father among them?"

"Alas, that one wine-bibbing night should wreck my future, O King! Zillah is the light of my life. Give her to me and I will pay thee the six silver talents though it beggar me the rest of my life."

"And where wouldst thou, a poet, get six talents?" scoffed the king. "Six talents is six talents."

"Aye, the King speaks wisely, six talents is six talents, and means the work of a life-time!" spoke a member of the tensely listening crowd.

"As thou knowest, O wise King," responded Ardavan, striving to keep his voice casual, "there are various ways of raising money."

"Go twang thy harp strings, poet, unless thou preferest to decorate a stouter string!" spoke Belshazzar impatiently. "Bring me the girl, Muse-zib!"

He flung a bag of coin toward the auction block, which Muse-zib caught ere it fell. The eunuch then turned to Zillah, but, ere he could lay hands upon her, she was down the steps and beside her lover:

"Cease trafficking in human souls, O King! Never shall Zillah pander to thy lusts!" Then to Achsah, "Poor woman, it will not be I who is thy suc-

cessor!" Stepping close to Belshazzar, she grabbed his jeweled dagger from his girdle, raised it high above her breast, but, even as the point pricked her skin, the king had her wrist in his hand, and the dagger fell to the ground.

"By Ishtar, girl, thou art charged with the fire of Shamish! 'Tis thus I like them!" exclaimed the king. He motioned to one of his officers, "Hold her! Take her to the harem, and, as thou valueth thy head, see that she does herself no harm!"

THE man dismounted, seized Zillah by the wrists, but, before he could lead her away, Nutimenides sprang forward, tore her from the officer, tripped him and, mounting his charger, placed the girl behind him and bore down upon the crowd. It was but a forlorn hope at best—before the horse had taken three leaps, his bridle was seized and Ardavan and his burden dragged back in front of the king.

A man of courage himself, Belshazzar admired it in others. Also he was in a tolerant humor. The fact that another wanted Zillah enough to try to take her before his very eyes, made her only the more desirable. In addition, he was inclined to pose as the beneficent, tolerant monarch. He slapped his thigh and chuckled, "For a poet, thou hast a ready wit and a strong arm, Nutimenides. Did I not need thee for the feast, I would impale thee upon my sword, but this time I forgive thee, for I understand thy plaint—the maid is indeed worth all thy effort. However," his voice took on a cruel ferocity, "see that in the future thou confinest thy fist to the harp strings."

Nutimenides sighed, stepped back as if in acquiescence, his mind searching

wildly for a means of rescuing his beloved.

Belshazzar grabbed Zillah to him, "Come, my dove, of the eagle heart, we will back to the palace where I will gentle thee according to my will." With a mocking grin upon his voluptuous features he pressed his sensual lips to Zillah's mouth, down her neck to her breast with wine-cellar lack of restraint.

The sight infuriated Ardavan. Ribald comments from the rear of the crowd where detection was not probable were hurled throne-ward. Belshazzar felt himself the center of attention. It tickled his vanity, but he mistook his leading lady.

When Zillah felt the coarse lips of the man upon her own, a fury arose within her that set restraint and dignity at naught. "May the foul demon take thee!" she exclaimed, and buried the fingers of both hands in his long, silky, elaborately curled beard. Though delicate looking, she was a strong, healthy muscled girl, and the tears came to the king's eyes. With varying shades of expression, officers dismounted and hurried kingward. Zillah loosened her hold, ran to Ardavan, who was struggling vainly against his captors, and threw her arms about his neck.

Snickers from the back rows, and involuntary lip quirks from those in front sent a flush of anger to Belshazzar's cheeks. He tore the girl from Ardavan's neck, slapped her face brutally.

As an involuntary gasp of protest arose from the crowd, Ardavan broke the hold of his captors, swung Zillah behind him, shot forth his right fist. "Take that, thou impious blasphemer!"

Though a goodly blow from a hundred and eighty pound man, it only

rocked Belshazzar, and before Ardavan could follow with another, he was seized from the rear. While the men held him, Belshazzar drove his fist again and again into Ardavan's face, till the crowd hooted him back to quietness if not dignity.

"Now will I make thee really fear," snarled the king. "To the dungeon with him!" He wiped his bloody hands upon his robe. The crowd, breathless with interest and alarm, pressed back.

ACHSAH had been a silent witness to all this. She had ever an eye toward opportunity. She knew the king's pride had suffered an unforgivable wound. She saw a magnificent chance to revenge herself upon Ardavan for scorning her, and at the same time augment the king's unpopularity with the citizens of Babylon. She salaamed low, "O mighty King, may thy heart be enlarged, thy liver exalted! Deign to hear thine handmaiden."

Belshazzar resumed his seat, drew his kingly robes about him, "Say on, Achsah!" he replied.

"Thou hast misread thy handmaiden, 'tis true I have appeared to look with favor upon yon poet, but it was only in the interests of the king—"

"Humph!" interrupted Belshazzar. "And did thy heart not follow thy glances, 'twas a good piece of acting!"

Achsah crossed her hands upon her breast, and stood humbly with bowed head.

"Say on," commanded the king sourly, rubbing his rapidly swelling chin. "Nutimenides is but a Greek poet and therefore negligible."

"A poet, true, O King, but neither Greek nor negligible, but Ardavan,

Prince of Persia, a spy from the army of Cyrus the king."

"What sayest thou? Where gettest thou thy information, woman?" queried the king fiercely. "If this be true, the torture chambers shall have a busy day!"

"Wait, O King," interrupted Ardavan. "Remember, peace lies between Persia and Babylonia, cemented by thy approaching marriage with the Princess Atossa, daughter of Cyrus the Great. What thinkest thou will happen dost thou confine a noble of his court in thy underground chambers of horror?"

Belshazzar stroked his beard, his brows one ferocious line over his eyes.

Achsah shot a malevolent look at Ardavan. "Stay thy mercy, O King," she begged. "Even Cyrus would blame thee not for impaling one who had invaded the sacred precincts of the harem garden. 'Twas only yester eve that yon poet sneaked into the garden and tried to bend me to his will, but Musezib came to my rescue, as his swollen chin can testify."

"Aye, that is true, may Marduk be my witness," interrupted Musezib.

"Methinks the fist of the poet hath an affinity for swelling chins as well as harp strings," commented a citizen.

"Be still!" thundered Belshazzar. "Continue, Achsah. What happened ere Musezib so opportunely arrived?"

"He tried to get me to kill thee in thy sleep and flee to the camp of his uncle, Cyrus, Persia's king. He even has the gate keepers bribed to open the gates, the password is '*The king*.' Dost thou doubt me, try it on Bel-Katsir, keeper of the Gate of Illu."

"Traitor!" cried Ardavan. "She herself led me to the arbor, else how would I have known where to go? And

'tis her own plot she outlines. The intentions of my uncle the king are honorable. 'Better,' said he, 'an alliance without bloodshed than a victory with mourning.'"

"Ha!" countered Achsah. "What of the Egyptian, found in a deep sleep in the market place this morning, who, upon awaking, swears he was robbed of—"

"Enough!" snapped Belshazzar, who did not want his private negotiations made public. "Thy tongue, Achsah, may over-reach itself! Search this poet, Ludor, Ubar, then to the dungeon with him. Let the irons be heated, the spiked maiden oiled. Verily by tonight shall the poet's voice be raised in song, a wailing song of agony! Look thy last upon thy love, Ardavan, Prince of Persia, Bard of Babylon, for, ere Shamus sets, will thy sockets be but bleeding holes! Find me that papyrus!"

"Nay, nay, have mercy, O King!" Zillah flung herself at Belshazzar's feet. "Willingly will I go with thee dost thou release him and send him back to his king! Have pity, O King, even as thou sometime may need mercy!"

Ardavan stood tall and proud between his captors, as they searched in vain for the papyrus he had so wisely entrusted to Zophar. He spoke, "Humble thyself not, Zillah, before this inhuman monster. A man can die but once, and as for thee, thou hast that which will protect thee. Death may at times be a friend."

"Death," chuckled Belshazzar, jeeringly, "I do not intend thee to die—immediately. There is worse than death! Off with him!"

"Wait!" The girl's command was so startling that Ardavan's captors paused involuntarily. Zillah arose from her

knees, faced the king. She stood straight and tall, her face glowing with a deathly paleness, a prophetic vision upon her. The crowd stared open mouthed. "Thou canst torture our bodies, O King, but thou canst not quench the spirit, and thy cruelties shall rebound upon thine own head, for the Lord God is a just God." She turned to Achsah. "As for thee, thou traitress to both sides, thou hast been foresworn by two men this day. Because of thy sins, to thy dying day, never again shall a man look into thine eyes with love!"

Achsah shrank back, hid behind her veil.

Belshazzar stroked his beard. "Verily, thou art a healthy curser, daughter of Zion, but methinks there is that coming which will render thee twice willing!" He turned to Ardavan's captors. "Hold! Let the poet also observe what happens to those who defy the king!" He turned to the tensely listening throng, "Behold, citizens of Babylon, and cheer the might of the king!"

CHAPTER VII

The Winged Bull

THERE was a lack of comment that was ominous, but, had the crowd murmured, the sound would have been drowned in a greater noise. All heads turned to the south whence came a tremendous rumbling and scraping, combined with a shouting and cracking of whips.

A squad of spearmen forced a path-way through the crowd. "Back! Back! Make way for the stone bull!"

Then appeared four rows of men bearing heavy, cable-like ropes upon their shoulders, a hundred men to the rope, some wearing robes, some breech-

clouds only. Behind them, creaking and screeching as if in agony, came an immense sledge on rollers, on which towered the fifty ton marble winged bull with human head, which Belshazzar was moving to his palace in time for the feast. Seven guy ropes on either side kept the monster from toppling, while a man on the prow of the sledge kept time with his hands for the pulls which must come at regular intervals. A second foreman gave orders with a trumpet. On either side walked men with axes, shovels, pickaxes, all guarded by soldiers with spears and overseers with whips to prick or lash the laggards.

So intent had the crowd been upon the immense figure of the stone bull, that it had given the dusty, sweat-streaked rope bearers only a cursory glance. The sun shone down upon them pitilessly. The overseer's lash fell heavily upon the shoulders of the foremost on the rope nearest the king, an elderly, black bearded Jew, clad only in a breechclout.

"Lie down on the job, wilt thou!" shouted the overseer in an excess of zeal to shine before Belshazzar. "Take that!" The whip laid another broad welt upon the old man's back.

A murmur of protest arose from the crowd simultaneously with a cry from Zillah. "Father! Father!" and, as once more the lash fell, she broke from her captor, ran to her father and flung her arms around his neck, her hair about his nakedness.

The old man laid his head upon her shoulder. "The time is come, daughter; take thou what I gavest thee. I am almost spent."

Zillah's hand flashed to her girdle, went to her mouth, and then, as if human endurance had reached its limit,

she slid to the dust. Asa himself sank beside her, tried to raise her in his weakened arms.

"Zillah! Zillah!" It was a cry of anguish. With superhuman strength, Ardavan tore from the hands of his captors, ran to Zillah, raised her tenderly in his arms. "Awake! Awake, beloved!" But Zillah lay quiet and pale.

By this time the murmur of the throng had risen to a roar of protest. "'Tis Asa, the healer! Release him! Give the maid to her lover!" The shout became a thunder of hatred, as a soldier at Belshazzar's command snatched Zillah from her lover's arms. Hands were raised threateningly.

Belshazzar looked worried, Achsah shrank behind the dais.

SUDDENLY the roar ceased as if clipped with a sword, the threatening arms remained stationary an instant, sank slowly.

"Peace!" The voice rang like a deep-toned bell. The hush was even more potent than the roar. Then there appeared, from whence none knew, the figure of a patriarchal old man with snow white beard. He wore a fine white linen robe fringed in blue, and a tunic of the same color. In his hand he carried a staff.

"'Tis Daniel, the prophet!" The whisper went from mouth to mouth. Every head bowed in silent tribute to the man so beloved of his fellow citizens. Breathless, everyone watched to see what he would do.

"Asa, my friend, how camest thou in this plight?" he asked gently, and raised the old man from the dust and wrapped his nakedness in his own mantle. Then, stepping in front of him, as if to shield him, he turned to Belshazzar:

"When wilt thou cease thy cruelties, O King? Remember, the Lord God is a just God and will smite thee, even as thou hast smitten! Release these captives and let them go their way."

Belshazzar was not to be humiliated the second time that day, though he was visibly shaken. He gathered his

the powers of thy godlet to the limit, O wise Daniel!"

"Go quietly, my son," said Daniel, "And peace attend thee. The Lord is mighty to protect. He shall shelter thee from harm."

"Ha!" snorted the king derisively, "And now for thy friend!"



"Peace!" The voice rang like a deep-toned bell.

dignity about him, seated himself. "Thou pratest of thy god and his smittings. By Marduk, we shall see! If thy god is of such power, and thou art his prophet, let him prevent me from working my will upon those who have flouted me! Ludor, Ubar, away with him! See that the fires are hot, and that the sweetheart of Babylon greeteth him with a warm embrace! We'll test

"What of my friend?" asked Daniel quietly.

"He shall have a hundred lashes upon his lazy back! Stand aside, Jew!"

Daniel complied. A gasp of relief went up. Where Asa had stood, there lay in the dust only a loin cloth.

"A miracle! A miracle! The mighty man of God!" shouted the crowd.

For a moment Belshazzar was star-

tled. His face went a shade paler. Then Achsah stepped forward.

"A miracle?" she sneered. "He but hid in the crowd."

The king was once more master of himself, "Trickery!" he scoffed. "Any sorcerer in Babylon could do better! Come, Achsah, thy wit, as always, hath stood thee in good stead this day." He arose, went to his charger.

Achsah drew aside her veil, smiled triumphantly at the crowd as she made her way to her four-wheeled coach.

The throng looked for Daniel, but he had disappeared. Talking in undertones it began to melt apart; interest in the marriage mart at an end, Babylon once more went about its private business, only a few remaining to bid upon the maidens. Musezib wrung his hands with grief. Now would his commissions be only half.

CHAPTER VIII

The Dungeon

FASTENED by either hand to a mounted soldier, Ardavan was hurried from the marriage mart toward the prison, which lay about six miles from the center of the city. The soldiers, anxious to get back to the festivities, set a rapid pace, so Ardavan, had he not been a seasoned climber and runner, trained by a rigid discipline in the armies of Cyrus in his native Persian mountains would have been overcome by the heat which was growing ever more intense. So, though exhausted, eyes blackened and swollen by Belshazzar's beating, sun-blistered, perspiring and dusty, he doggedly ran his grisly marathon between his captors, his brain working as furiously as his heels.

The threat of burning out his eyes

he knew was not an idle one. Belshazzar's cruelties to his prisoners were notorious. Very different was he from Cyrus, who never took life unless he considered it absolutely necessary. The iron of fear was in Ardavan's heart, but he was determined to show it in no way if he could possibly prevent it, and in any event, he decided that he might be able to take one or two of his torturers with him. As for himself, he dreaded the pain, and hoped, with a quick thrust of his head, to cause the hot iron to enter his brain and thus end it all quickly. There was but one comforting thought in the whole agonizing mess, and that was that Zillah would meet him on the other side. Nay, there was still another: the hope that Zophar might get the papyrus to Cyrus in time to prove Belshazzar's perfidy and enable Cyrus to swoop down upon Babylon the night of the feast.

As he ran on and on, his feet toeing up clouds of dust, it seemed as if his heart would burst. Better that it should than the terrible torture. Suddenly the words of Daniel came to mind: "The Lord is mighty to save. He shall shelter thee from harm." They gave him strange comfort, though he did not believe them. There seemed to be no way out of the terrible predicament he was in, still he ran on, spent and panting, the rhythm of the words, "Mighty to save, mighty to save" padding into the dust with his lagging footbeats.

They approached the prison now, its gray walls loomed before them. The horsemen stopped before the great gate, "Ho, Illi, Nergal!"

A short, bull necked man with crafty eyes opened the gate. "I am Nergal, keeper of the dungeon. Illi comes on at sundown, that is, if he returns from the wine cellars in time."

The hope that had risen in Ardavan's heart upon the mention of Illi, lover of Adah, flickered and went out. Tonight would be too late.

"Call thy helpers, Nergal; a prisoner from the king. A brave man and strong. Put him to the torture. Burn his eyes out ere tomorrow night, then, if he live, he heads the Persian prisoners taken at Borsippa which are to form part of the king's procession tomorrow night at the feast. I like it not, but 'tis the king's command, and he assures me that dost thou deviate one jot or tittle from these orders, he will lift thy head from thy shoulders in no pleasant manner."

"When has the king had cause for complaint of me?" asked Nergal, his piggy eyes gleaming with cruelty. "'Tis some time since the spiked sweet-heart below has had a lover stretched upon her prickly breast, and as for the fire, it shall burn brightly as soon as I can get some faggots." He turned, spoke roughly to a woman slinking near.

"Get thee gone, Adah! Seek thy lover in the wine cellars, he is not here." He whistled and three burly guards came. "Take this man below, heat the irons, and grease the spiked maiden."

DOWN through a narrow corridor leading toward the river they led Ardavan. Unsunned for many a long year, the walls were dank with ooze from the river, the bricks they trod upon fetid, slimy, cold, crawling with creatures of the dark. Gaunt faces peered at him from dark cells, bony arms reached out to him in hope of succor, but Ardavan was too exhausted even to pity. He must have sleep. It would be some time before they were

ready for him, and if he could get a little rest he could perhaps think of something.

He was thrust into a dark cell below street level with only a narrow, barred window high up for light and ventilation. He sank to the floor with exhaustion. Hardly had he relaxed when outcries and oaths told of the entrance of more struggling prisoners.

"May the foul demons take the perfidious Achshah!" exclaimed a voice. "I trusted her and she betrayed me!"

"Did I not warn thee, Katsir, not to trust the woman?"

Ardavan gasped—it was the bull-like roar of Zophar. On his belly he crawled to the crack under the heavy, bronze studded door and listened.

"Ha," retorted Katsir, "I note that thou too art here, thou non-woman trusting yokel!"

"Yea, because of thy lack of wit, not only I but all the gate keepers whom we had on our side are also guests of Belshazzar, and Cyrus will find locked gates does he come!" Zophar's voice bellowed with anger. "But, by Marduk, I shall not die without striking a lusty blow!"

"And I with thee, Zophar!" shouted Bel-Katsir. "Have at them!"

There came to Ardavan's ears the sound of blows, a gurgled cry, "He stabbed me!" the dull thud of a falling body that told of the power of armed guards against unarmed men.

Suddenly more footsteps, a voice ringing, sonorous, yet wondrously calming in effect, "Peace, Zophar, trust in the Lord God Jehovah, He is mighty to save."

"Not—on—this—earth, O wise Daniel, I—go to my—closer, bend close, holy one, thy blessing—" then a dying

gurgle, a raucous laugh from a guard, "Ha, mighty to save, in truth! Then why saved he not this Jewish carrion?" The thud of a boot upon dead flesh. "Nor will he save thee, hoary one! Come!"

Groans . . . reluctant footsteps dragging down the corridor smote upon Ardavan's ears. He shook a futile fist toward the ceiling, "Mighty to save! Zillah dead, Zophar dead, the papyrus on his corpse, the gates guarded by Belshazzar's men, Daniel himself in prison, I facing the torture! Mighty to save indeed! Curses upon thee, Ahura, whom the Jews call Jehovah!" Ardavan's arm dropped to his side. Nature had her way with him; he slept, muttering in his dreams, "Mighty to save—mighty to—save."

HE WAS awakened by a light shining on his face. Two men with torches bent over him. They were powerful brutes, and the breath of one smelled strongly of the wine cellars.

"Come," he said thickly, "the fires burn, the irons are hot, at last. The thieving pit burners stole our fuel to feed the fires under the oxen roasting for the feast, we scoured the city for faggots. Thou hast slept the day away. Thou wilt make a lusty victim for the spiked sweetheart!"

They jerked him to his feet. Suddenly—it may have been the inspiration of Ahura, it may have been the odor of liquor—a full fledged plan sprang to mind.

"Art thou Illi, the lover of Adah?" he asked the bibulous one.

"Aye."

"Grant a dying man's last request, a word with the prophet Daniel. I am Nutimenides, lover of Zillah, who gave unto Adah her freedom to marry thee."

"Thou Nutimenides?" hiccupped Illi. "Thou gavest us two maneh. I would grant much for two maneh!"

"Nay," protested Nergal, "the man is strong and full of tricks, and the rods cool."

But Illi was tipsily stubborn. Ardavan was led down the narrow staircase through a row of cells to where Daniel's pale, aesthetic face peered through the cell window. They spoke briefly in Greek, and then Nergal prevailed. Ardavan resumed his death march, but with what a difference! Now the rhythm of the words, "Mighty to save," echoed back from the slimy walls with a ring of hope.

Step by step the gloomy passage led down the narrow staircase. Rats and other night loving creatures scurried away at their approach. White faces thrust themselves through the small food windows in the mighty doors. Some were white bearded and old, others with black beards and the ruddy darkness with which Shamash paints his children of Babylonia, told of recent imprisonment. Bel-Katsir, keeper of the north gate, shook his fist in the faces of Illi and Nergal and cursed them as they passed, and still they strode on, down, down, down.

Ardavan wondered if the rhythm of the old prophet's words, "Mighty to save," was lulling him with false hope. He searched closely for means of escape. There was none—the walls were ventless, the grasp of his guards resolute. Down, down they went, step by step, below the river bottom where agonized cries could not be heard. Cold sweat beaded Ardavan's brow. They entered the torture chamber. It was at the foot of the stairway. It needed no door nor gate. When one left this place,

he was in no mood for escape or anything else.

Directly opposite lay the spiked sweetheart, a rack, studded with short, sharp points, points that would lacerate and torture, but not reach any vital part. A man was testing straps, for the rack could stretch its victims as well as lacerate. In the corner next to the staircase, another was heating to white heat sharp pointed rods. Ardavan moistened his cracked and swollen lips.

"Now for the love scene, slaves!" shouted Nergal, and began dragging Ardavan toward the rack.

Ardavan struggled, but they were too many for him and soon had him laid naked on the "Sweetheart of Babylon." The sharp points bit into his skin, but not yet had they succeeded in fastening his flailing arms and legs. Illi held his right wrist, began thrusting it down toward the strap. His grasp was not as firm as became a loyal son of Babylon, his face was white with sweat, and he retched several times. Ardavan fancied there was a slight drooping of one eyelid.

"What's that?" he shouted, and gave Illi a thrust with his fist, whereupon Illi lost his balance and tumbled backward. In the momentary, involuntary pause that followed his cry, Ardavan gave a mighty heave, freed his feet from the grasp of Nergal and the rack attendant, gave Nergal a stalwart kick in the stomach with both feet, swung himself to the floor and made for the fire attendant who was coming at him with a hot rod in each hand. Him, Ardavan knocked back into his own fire with one on the chin, seized a hot rod in each hand and dared the rack attendant to come on. The fellow had no intention of doing so and made for the stairway, but Ardavan was before

him, brandishing the weapons. Meanwhile, Illi had recovered his feet, the fire attendant had rolled from the bed of hot ashes, and was groaningly nursing the burns on the back of his head.

"ILLI," Ardavan's tone was sharp, "strip Nergal and put him on the rack. As for thee," he spoke to the cringing rack attendant, "help Illi, or by Ahura, thine eyes shall pay the penalty!"

Cringing, they set to work. Meantime, Ardavan bound and gagged the groaning fire attendant. "I will send thee aid, shortly," he promised.

The rack attendant was next taken care of, made to assume Ardavan's clothes, while Ardavan himself put on those of Nergal, picked up his keys, weapons and seal cylinder. The attendant, bound and gagged, was blindfolded and made to climb the steps between them.

"Do thou limp and appear weak from the torture, or thy life shall pay!" commanded Ardavan, pricking the man's side with Nergal's knife.

When they reached the cell of Bel-Katsir, Ardavan commanded Illi to unlock it. When the gate-keeper emerged, goggle-eyed with amazement, Ardavan spoke rapidly. "Listen closely, time flies, the guards without are watching. With these keys, numbered according to the cell, unlock the doors of all those who promise fealty to Cyrus. Release all the prisoners taken last year in the battle of Borsippa, also all the gate-keepers and all the Jews you can find. Order the gate-keepers to lurk about their former posts, reinforce them with the other prisoners, and, tomorrow night, when Shamash

has sunk three double-hours behind Bel-Marduk, seize the new gatekeepers, close the north gate of Illu, and, when the waters have sunk to hip level, and the first hour of the new day is at hand, and all Babylon feasts, follow him who calls, "Follow *the* king, the *great* king."

"By Marduk, that will I do, and gladly, nor I alone, for there are many among the city's five hundred thousand, whose bellies are cracked with siege rations, and whose minds are against the tyrannies of the uncrowned king."

"That were well," returned Ardavan, "but be certain of thy man. Now I must to the cell of Daniel; 'tis possible he hath the Egyptian papyrus."

"He hath. I saw Zophar thrust it into Daniel's hand, as the prophet pronounced the final blessing."

"Then doth Ahura smile upon us! If all goeth as I plan, the papyrus will be in the hands of Cyrus ere the moon reacheth the high arc of the heavens, and the army will take to horse and chariot by to-morrow's sunset, while the king feasts with a thousand of his lords. Then shall the death of Zillah be revenged!"

"Aye," agreed Bel-Katsir, "If thou canst escape the entrance guards!"

"Easily done!" spoke Ardavan. "I as Nergal, and Illi here as himself, will take this eyeless, tortured, limping poet, Ardavan, to the king. 'Tis dark and the gatekeepers are too wine-sogged to note closely—" A groan broke from behind the gag. "Now should this cringing poet happen to escape—" Here the blindfolded figure straightened with relief—"the guard would pursue him. Then, Katsir, would be thy opportunity to depart, together with all the other prisoners. When the guards return,

either with or without their prisoner, and find an empty prison, if I know the minds of men there will be either a wild story of a miracle, or ten new soldiers for Cyrus who deals not in torture chambers. Now make haste with thy releases. We will tarry a moment that thou may follow us to take care of the one or two men who remain to guard the prison while the others pursue the fleeting poet."

SOBS of joy, prayers of thanks echoed through the dim, bat-smelling corridors as cell after cell was opened. Then began the ascent with the stumbling captive. When they reached the entrance, Illi called to the ten men lolling around the gates, "Horses, Kharmaza, Rasuh! Nergal and I take this sweetheart of the spiked maiden to the king in the same manner he came. Hasten, the king is no pleasant waiter!"

The guards complied with all the alacrity their wine-wobbling legs would allow. Ardavan and Illi mounted, with the pseudo Ardavan dragging between them, tied by either hand to their saddles. They sped north toward the gate of Illu. When they had gone but a short distance, Ardavan spoke, "Thou art to escape now, fellow, that is if thy legs are swift. Dive into the river, and do thy fellow dungeon-keepers find a *kufa*-man's garments floating in the Euphrates with spear rents in them, justice will have been done, and everyone satisfied."

With that the thongs were cut, the man given a fair start, and Illi and Ardavan set up a great cry, "Kharmaza, Rasuh, help! The demon escapes! Help!"

No time to mount steeds, the guards came rushing on foot. "Look to the

river, we will follow north!" and Ardavan and Illi smote their chargers and made for the north water-gate.

In their rear they could hear cries, "There he goes, he diveth in the river. He is a demon of the Evil-one, else how could a rack-tortured, blind man run and swim as he swimmeth!"

Fainter grew the cries as Ardavan and Illi rode northward, the precious papyrus that gave Cyrus ample reason for breaking the truce safe tied in his robe.

The two horsemen rode far into the dawn till the black tents of Cyrus the Great welcomed them from the fierceness of the heat.

Immediately upon their arrival three messengers sped southward by different routes to where the other division of the siege weary army lay encamped ten *farsangs* south of Babylon under the leadership of Darius the Mede. Could they make it in time to get the Mede's army of footmen started early enough to reach the south gate by the time the water ran hip-deep?

Ardavan asked himself this as he lay in the tent of Cyrus the King. He must rest till nightfall, then back to Babylon and Belshazzar, and, if he got to the king first, as he planned, the reckoning would be sweet! There was nothing left him in life but revenge.

"Oh, Zillah, Zillah, my beloved!" he mourned, wide-eyed with sorrow. He went over the events of their lives together. How often had they sat on her father's roof, harps in hand and sung. He thought of the songs of David, which she so loved, and which he too had learned. He could hear her golden voice intoning, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt-thou—trust—" Ardavan slept.

CHAPTER IX

In the King's Harem

BUT Zillah was not dead, though through no fault of her own; her trembling fingers had dropped one of the precious pellets, so she lay waxen white and still save for an almost imperceptible flutter of the heart, in the harem of the king.

It was approaching night-fall on the day of the feast of Belshazzar when she regained consciousness. She found herself lying on a soft cushioned couch in a spacious, high-ceilinged room. On the floors were heavy, rich hued rugs. The walls, done in glazed tiles, pictured Ishtar, goddess of love, in many brilliantly colored scenes. Vines twined about the columns that supported the lofty ceiling. Fountains tinkled, spraying perfumed water which fell back into lotus carpeted pools where fish darted to and fro.

"Father! Father!" exclaimed the girl, struggling to a sitting position.

A fat faced, richly clad old woman with kindly expression put an arm about her, held a steaming bowl to her lips. "Drink this, child. Thy father escaped through a miracle of the mighty Daniel and has not been heard of since."

"And who art thou?"

"I am Ubartu, grandmother of the king. Come, child, empty the bowl, thou hast not eaten since yesterday morn, but hast lain in a stupor. We thought thou wouldst not recover in time for the feast to-night when great honor awaits thee."

"Tonight?" Zillah felt for her belt, perhaps the other pellet— She had no belt, her clothes had been removed, she wore a loose, flowing robe she had never

before seen. With a sigh of despair she sank back upon the cushions and drowsiness again overtook her.

Finally sound broke through her tortured dreams, "Come, little one, awake! The King awaits thee. Don thy festal robes!" It was Ubartu slapping her cheeks smartly, sopping her face with water.

Zillah sat up, arose unsteadily to her feet. Verily, her father's pellet had proved potent. Then, as circulation was restored, she felt unusually invigorated. She noted that the sun was sinking. A slave brought a bowl of rich mutton broth. She drank it down. A sip of wine, a drink of water, and the blood rioted through her veins. But alas! What was life without Ardavan? And Ardavan was no doubt by this time either dead or dying of the torture. Yea, there was something to life! Revenge! If she could but get her hand upon a dagger! The king should have an apparently willing, dazzled victim, a victim overcome by the honor of being his concubine! Her lips sneered at the thought. She stretched her arms high above her head, inhaled deeply, laughed shrilly, "Bring on the robes!" she cried. "Deck these arms with jewels! This night shall a daughter of Israel outshine the fairest of the king's concubines!"

"By Ishtar, thou art fair!" exclaimed Ubartu. "Would that thou were my daughter indeed instead of the haughty Persian who is even now upon her way!"

"Art thou sure thou hast heard naught of Ardavan and Daniel?" questioned Zillah.

"Nay, naught. Little of the streets creeps into the king's harem. Daniel I knew when I was young. A goodly

man, and a sorcerer who put the king's men of magic to shame. But make haste. To-night thou sittest at the king's right hand between him and myself till he leaveth at midnight to lead thee to his harem."

A normal, womanly hatred entered Zillah's heart at the thought of the person she was unwillingly displacing, who had caused Ardavan's imprisonment and torture because of her jealous rage at being thwarted in love. "And where sits Achshah?"

"To the king's left," chuckled Ubartu, "where she can see thy exaltation at her expense, and serve as a cushion for Belshazzar's thrusts of wit. Serve her right. I never could abide her, scheming huzzy!"

Grins of agreement on the part of the attending slaves told of Achshah's unpopularity in the harem.

But hatred could not long abide where were love and anxiety. She must find out, wheedle it from the king himself. Jehovah help her in the mission!

"Bring the robes!" she commanded.

Willing hands now brought forth the deckings the king had provided: an undertunic of the finest gauze, purple and white striped to indicate royalty; an over tunic of a light lavender, the neck bordered with gold and jewels; the girdle a reddish purple, also gold embroidered and jewel encrusted with amethysts, diamonds, sapphires, topazes. Then crimson leather sandals, anklets of gold, rings, bracelets, necklaces, beads, earrings, the emerald set fillet to hold the veil and headdress. Strands of beads to weave in the long copper colored braids falling over her shoulders.

"Verily, thou art lovely as the sunset!" exclaimed Ubartu, "And Belshaz-

zar loveth the sunset more than the moonlight."

CHAPTER X

The Feast of Belshazzar

SHAMASH'S dying rays were spreading golden fingers along the horizon, the Feast of Belshazzar was at hand. Criers rode four abreast down the streets calling, "Rejoice! Rejoice! The Persians have departed! Belshazzar invites thee to his tables! Make ready to feast with the King! Glory and power to the mightiest of monarchs! All hail Belshazzar!"

And each of Babylon's five hundred thousand responded to the invitation in his own way: Rope factories closed down; rug merchants put up their awnings; brass factories ceased their yammer; men with wine skins on their shoulders went down the streets dispensing free drinks; wine cellars disgorged drunken sailors; slave elbowed master in hastening to his particular feasting place. Half Babylon was drunk.

The other half listened to whispered directions in which the words, "*The king, the great king*" frequently occurred. But there was no diminution of the carnival spirit. A camel caravan laden with goods from Syria wound slowly down the street impeded by the crowds, and the leader stopped to curse certain individuals freely. *Kufas* from the north still poled lazily along the tiled river banks calling their produce, and many a one spoke with a Persian accent. Biremes, with slowly dipping oars and flower garlanded prows on which fluters piped the stroke, skirted the *kufas*. Laughter, singing, quips, jests, ribaldry, threaded the atmosphere; the Lady of Kingdoms had put on gala attire, and she laughed a harlot's laugh.

IN THE palace of the king, preparation was complete. Gaily colored, gold-fringed awnings worked with pulleys were stretched over corridors and walls. Immense candlesticks, taller than a man, tapered from heavy standards below to delicate carving and traceries above till the oil cups were reached. There perfumed oil and wax lighted the scene, their tongues of flame reflected a thousand fold by the glazed tile walls and ceiling. Tables rested on richly colored rugs; on these, cups of gold, glass, jade, dazzled the eye; immense silver and gold mixing bowls, beautifully carved, sent their heady odors up to mingle with the perfumes from tinkling fountains and the fragrance of the flowers strewn upon the tables. Hundreds of slaves and eunuchs stood about, ready to serve the expected guests. Other slaves waved gigantic fans over the tables to keep the night moths and gnats away. At the head of the banquet hall stood the king's table, slightly higher than the rest. Behind it, facing the entrance, where the broad flight of steps led to the garden, a raised dais blazing with royal color told where Belshazzar was to sit.

Suddenly every slave froze to attention—the king's trumpeters were heard. Belshazzar had welcomed his five hundred thousand guests to the various feast centers with a royal procession which now advanced to its own banquet. Nearer and nearer sounded the blare of trumpets, the clangor of cymbals, the measured boom of kettle drums. A herald mounted the steps from street to banquet hall, "The King!" he bawled, "Make way for the mighty King of Sumer and Akkad, Belshazzar the Mighty!"

Even the shrilling of many drunken



A black charger with gilded hoofs arched his neck and pranced up the broad stairway as if proud of his burden.

tongues was stilled as all craned forward to see the mighty monarch.

Up the broad stairway into the hundred and fifty cubit hall came the royal procession: first a guard of soldiers, silver armored, ten abreast; then the musicians, a hundred strong, each wearing the peaked cap of his guild; trumpeters, twenty in number, then cymbal players; next kettle drums, after which followed the fluters ten abreast to a hundred; fifty harps and zithers, their gentler strains barely heard amid the din; after these the priests of Bel-Marduk, two by two bearing torches. Dressed in white over which were flung the sacred goat skins, their beards curled smooth and glossy as silk, the priests of Bel were broad of brow, mighty of body, their height enhanced by the mitres on their heads set with bullocks' horns. After the priests came the singers, one hundred chosen men, ten by ten, making deep harmonies, which blended in with those of two hundred youths of lighter voice, all marching to the measured rhythm of their chant. As they sang, and the musicians played, there next swept up the stairway the lords of the court, a stately throng, a mighty river of gold, crimson and precious stones.

As the procession reached the banquet hall, it split and took its stand on either side, a glittering human lane through which the king would pass to his throne. And then he came alone.

A black charger with gilded hoofs arched his neck and pranced up the broad stairway as if proud of his burden. And well he might be, Belshazzar was never more kingly than now. Arrayed in a purple cloak wrought with gold flowered scrolls; hair bound with a twisted fillet, encrusted with jewels which held his white linen tiara, black

beard, curled and silky as a raven's wing, he held the golden sceptre of the kingdom in his right hand and surveyed the scene. At sight of him a spontaneous shout arose:

"A god, not a man! All hail the King!" With one consent the lords, priests, singers, prostrated themselves upon the ground.

GRATIFIED, Belshazzar smiled, waved his sceptre as a rising signal, and the procession continued. Up the stairway came eunuchs bearing litters on their shoulders in which sat the ladies of the court. First, the queen grandmother, Ubartu, then Zillah, followed by Achsah. There was almost a stampede to catch glimpses of the new concubine.

Zillah looked straight ahead, shame flushing her cheeks, but Achsah, thinking to win favor with the crowd, smiled right and left.

Amid laughter and shouts the ladies descended from their litters and a scramble began for places, save at the king's table where each found his or her name done in clay at his assigned place. Then the tapestries were pulled aside revealing doorways through which slaves filed in a long procession, each bearing a wine jar. They began filling the gold and silver cups eagerly held out to them by the guests.

Belshazzar arose, held high his golden goblet, "Drink, drink, citizens of Babylon! May Anu, the god of chaos devour him who sees not the bottom of his cup seven times!" He turned, poured a few drops on the floor as a libation, the guests did likewise, and the feast was on. Four-wheeled, flower-garlanded carts were pulled in on which rested oxen roasted whole; slaves bore trays and baskets on which were pigeons,

carp, and other meat delicacies; others carried baskets in which were cress, olives, grapes, dates, nuts, pears, figs. Each guest turned to avidly. The sound of harps and zithers mingled with the tinkling of fountains, and the smacking of lips.

Belshazzar wiped his mouth on his sleeve, clapped his hands, "Bring on the entertainment!" he called. "Let my heart shrivel, my liver shrink, but I miss the voice of thy Greek singer, Achsah. Let him be brought!"

"Hast thou forgot the torture?" replied Achsah.

"Nay, but I gave orders that it was not to be unto the death, and he hath a lusty body. By this time he will be a delight to the eyes, eh, my rose of Sharon?" He grabbed Zillah to him, his arm about her waist.

Zillah paled, but made no resistance, even leaned a little closer, hoping to secure the dagger he wore at his girdle. Even yet she hoped for rescue, for she knew her father was a man of resource and they said he had escaped. Daniel also was a magician of mighty power, surely he would do something to save the daughter of his friend from a fate worse than death. She forced her face into the semblance of a smile.

Pleased at the seeming acquiescence, Belshazzar drew her closer, planting a sensual kiss upon her neck, "Thou art shy as a partridge, but I will gentle thee at midnight." Once more he remembered his guests and the unfulfilled command he had previously given, "Where's that poet, he was to be kept in waiting!"

A soldier stepped forward, "O King, live forever," he salaamed to the floor. "It grieves me to report that last night, after the torture, though weak and eye-

less, he eluded the guards, jumped into the river and was drowned. Here is his garment with a spear rent in it."

A long shuddering sigh broke from Zillah, she swayed, but Belshazzar's arm held her steady. He stroked his beard.

"Dead, eh! I cannot feel it in my liver to grieve. No more will his purple plum eyes disturb the hearts of my harem, by now the fish are feeding from their empty sockets." He turned to Zillah, white faced and still. "Thou takest the death of thy lover coolly, little one."

The girl was like a wooden image, so tense was she. "I rejoice, my Lord, that he is forever away from thy cruelty."

"Allatu possess thee, maid, but thou art bold of tongue!" Then to the kneeling soldier, "Arise, I am in mellow mood tonight, but if thou liest, thou shalt be boiled in oil."

The soldier slunk back among his fellows.

The king became mindful of his guests. "Let the dancing girls and the sacred vessels be brought!"

Heartsick, Zillah peered out into the night. It was dark, dark as chaos itself. Where was her father? Where Daniel? The only answer was the wailing of flutes, the sound of drunken revelry from the streets, and the cries of "More! More!" from the guests holding out their empty wine cups.

MEANWHILE a rider on a white steed sped furiously southward through the darkness. The horse panted and frothed, but the plushy plop of his feet in the sand pounded steadily on. Behind the lone rider, on padded hoofs, a thousand horsemen rode over

the plains. There was no blare of war horns, no thud of kettle drums; commands were given in whispers. Leading the cavalry was Cyrus the king, now an old man, but none the less vigorous. Grimly they rode, for the great bronze gate of Illu in the north wall of Imgur-bel was now closed, they knew by the rapid spread of water as it backed up by the great wall and began flowing out into the dry lake of Nitocris, which necessitated the army's skirting the water and making its way around to the first west sand gate.

And Babylon feasted and drank, while to the south, another army, led by Darius, rode rapidly north toward the south water gate.

In the city drunken men lolled against drunken women, others lay under the food strewn tables, and none observed the Euphrates running lower and lower till it was barely hip deep. None noticed that here and there figures detached themselves from the wine cups and left with surprisingly steady step. Nor did any but these sure footed ones note that from the *kufas*, tied along the quays, men arose from coverings of vegetables and fruits and joined the ever increasing numbers of the sober ones.

Then from the west came the echo of hoof beats, and through a sand gate came one on a white horse spent with travel. He dashed down the street waving his sword and called drunkenly, "Follow the king, the great king!" and though he swayed, he rode ever steadily on to the home of Asa the sorcerer, for he had a wild plan in mind that might so terrify the inhabitants of Babylon that they would repudiate their king, and render Belshazzar himself so fearful that he would be conquered before he even struck a blow. Then how

sweet would be the revenge for the death of Zillah!

IN THE palace of the king, a grisly procession was marching around the hollow square made by the banquet tables. The six hundred Jews taken the previous morning and sequestered in a smaller and newer prison than that which had held Ardavan, stripped of all but breech clouts and bound to each other by chains fastened about their ankles, were made to march in front of each table.

Tears of pity streamed down Zillah's face. Here were some of the city's finest men, humbled, beaten, disgraced. She was relieved, however, to see that her father was not among them, nor was Daniel.

"At last thou art softened!" exclaimed Belshazzar. "Thy tears become thee. We'll see how the next group affects thee, and thy friend Daniel. He shall be most thoroughly humbled and his godlet mocked, that I promise thee!"

Zillah made no response. Her eyes were wide with misery, for a group of Jewish maidens was entering, and they were led by Adah. They were dressed in light, gaily colored gauzes from India. Each held her chin high, though cheeks flushed at the ribald comments of the diners.

Belshazzar addressed them, "O daughters of a stiff-necked race, thou are to be the new dancing group. Watch well the maids trained by that traitorous Greek, Nutimenides. After they perform, thou shalt have thy turn, and mark well, awkwardness may be forgiven, but woe to her who wears not a smiling face! Snuff out the lights!"

Immediately hundreds of slaves went about putting out the lights, leaving the guests in darkness save for the flick-



Harold
Daly
Oct 28 '98

"Behold the sacred cup of Egypt. . . Drink, drink to the gods of Babylon!"

ering flame from two candlesticks near the entrance.

Suddenly sweet music was heard and fifty trained Babylonian dancing girls whirled in and began their weird bacchanal. And, while the jingle of anklets mingled with the tinkling of zithers and harps, a procession of white robed eunuchs strode in, bearing high above their heads the sacred vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the temples of other conquered countries.

Belshazzar gave the signal for the music to stop, and, as silently and swiftly as they had entered, the dancing girls departed. The king rose to his feet, took a vessel from the first eunuch, poured wine into it, sipped, held it high: "Behold the power of Bel-Marduk and of Belshazzar, his prince! From this sacred vessel of the Assyrians do I drink to the power of Bel, mighty god of Babylon, god above the gods of all nations. I ask thee, where now is Assur, god of Assyria? Let every Babylonian prove his loyalty by drinking from a sacred vessel!" He gave the chalice to Achsah who sipped it, then passed it on to eager hands reaching for it, while greedy eyes appraised its jewel-encrusted surface.

Taking the next goblet he held it high, "Behold the sacred cup of Egypt from which Pharaoh drank to Ammon-Ra. 'Twas taken by Nebuchadnezzar. Egypt is now our ally. Drink! Drink to the gods of Babylon!" Ubartu took the cup, sipped and passed it on.

"All hail Bel-Marduk! Hail Shamash, god of the sun!" came from a thousand throats.

"Now let the Hebrew dancing maids step forth!" commanded the king, a leer spreading his voluptuous lips. "'Tis fitting that they dance before their sacred vessels!"

Soldiers pushed the unwilling girls forward.

"A singer is needed, since our golden voiced Nutimenides is dead," continued Belshazzar. "Here, Imbi, your harp! Here, slaves, the sacred vessels from the temple of Jerusalem!" Receiving the first of the sacred chalices, he raised it so that the light, from the two remaining candles near the door, which danced upon its surface multiplied the beams and sent them back gleaming and scintillating from its many faceted jewels.

"Sing, Zillah; dance maidens as thou valuest thy lives! Where is thy Jewish godlet, Jehovah? Where is He? Jehovah is mocked! He is impotent! See I drink to Marduk from his sacred vessel!" He drank, passed the cup to Zillah.

REVERENTLY she received it, held it out before her. The captive maidens, huddled in the hollow square gazed at her in pale-faced horror. Reverently she raised it to her lips, spoke: "I drink from the sacred vessel from the Temple of Jerusalem!" She turned, faced Belshazzar defiantly. "Behold I drink! Jehovah is not mocked, He is all-powerful. Marduk will be confounded!" Seizing the harp she swept her hand across its strings, and her deep, rich contralto rose in a chant, wild, defiant:

"Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand;

It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

Therefore shall all hands be faint, And every man's heart shall melt—"

Mingled consternation and admiration shone on the faces of the guests. Belshazzar arose, seething with wrath—"Thou little—"

His threat hung in mid-air, for out of

the night, a clear tenor voice took up the chant:

"Babylon is taken, Babylon is taken,
Bel is confounded, Merodach is
broken in pieces.

Her idols are confounded, her images
broken in pieces.

For out of the north there cometh
up a nation against her

Which shall make her land desolate,
and none shall dwell therein.

For Babylon hath been a golden cup
in the Lord's hand

That maketh all the earth drunken!
Babylon is fallen, Babylon is fallen,
Howl for her!"

With a clatter, the harp fell from Zillah's hands, she raised them high in thanksgiving, a smile of joy irradiating her features, "A miracle! A miracle!" she called, "Nutimenides raised from the dead!"

Nearer and nearer, clearer and clearer rang the voice. The guests, whose religion was mostly bound up in superstition, shrank back in their seats and a whisper of fear went round.

Belshazzar seized his sceptre, pounded on the floor—"Fools! Cowards! Hast thou no guts, proud citizens, that the song of one escaped from death, sets thee to shivering like leaves in the wind?" Then to his guard, "Find me that voice!"

BUT there was no need, Nutimenides himself strode in, perspiring, dusty. He wore the leather uniform of the captain of the dungeon. Vengeance rode in his defiant chin, but joy and relief also at the sight of his loved one, so far safe from harm. Boldly he strode down the hollow square through the group of dazed maidens. "I have come for my bride, O King!" he announced.

"Verily thou hast the liver of a lion!" declared Belshazzar. "Were it not that defiance of the king must never go unpunished, I could find it in me to pardon thee! Seize him men!"

Reluctantly four men stepped forward. Awed by the surprising sequence of events, they were chary about laying hands upon one so recently risen from the dead.

Ardavan made no move. Now was not the time, not till he heard the trumpet blast telling that Darius was within the city; and that would not be for a while yet because he had traveled much faster than the weapon-burdened army. He trusted that Belshazzar's greed for triumph would delay proceedings until the surprised, bewildered city could offer little resistance. Belshazzar spoke:

"Let the soldier who reported the death of the Persian be brought forth, we would speak more fully with him." There was a deadly vindictiveness in his voice. But the soldier had faded out into the darkness. The king shrugged: "To-morrow will be soon enough, and the torture will be doubled in proportion to the delay!" He turned to his guests, his face a gleam with satisfaction: "We have had dances, chants and hymns of defiance; now, methinks a love song should gladden our ears, a song of hopeless love, nay a duet from these two turtle doves, eh, Ardavan? And Zillah, fair faced and eagle hearted, the memory of my mercy in allowing thee to sing with thy lover before he is put to death under thine own eyes may change thy attitude toward me in the future days we shall spend together. Strike thy harp strings!" He gave her the fallen harp.

Eagerly she seized it. It was good to look upon her loved one again, even though she suffered twice the agony of

his death. She would tell him of her undying love in the words of Solomon:

"As the apple tree among the trees of wood,
So is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste—"

Here Ardavan snatched a harp from a musician. She was in despair, he must give her hope! He took up the refrain as he had so often done on the roof of Asa, improvising, yet borrowing from the Hebrew poet:

"Behold thou art fair, my love; behold thou are fair;
Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and
and thy mouth is comely;
Thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate behind thy veil—"

He paused a moment, struck a chord, resumed:

"And thy countenance, it is fair as the light shining upon the wall!"
"Thy neck is like the tower of David—"

Would she get the interpolation, "the light shining upon the wall?" She was leaning eagerly forward, lips parted, eyes alight. Hastily he continued lest Belshazzar suspect:

"Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away.
For lo, the winter is past,
The winter is over and gone;
The flowers appear upon the earth;
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in the land;"

He ended upon a high inflection that asked a question. Immediately came the reply:

"Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm:
For love is as strong as death;
Like light shining upon the wall is love;
Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it."

Slowly, with long sustained tones Zillah dwelt upon the line, "Like light shining upon the wall," and Ardavan

was content, for he knew that she had caught his message that rescue was at hand.

"**H**AVE DONE!" commanded Belshazzar, "The wine cups are empty. Slaves, to thy duties!" Then to his guests, "Once more, men of Babylon, a pledge to him whose power endureth forever, a cup to Bel-Marduk who crusheth the puny gods of the Hebrews and the Persians! Let each guest drink from a vessel from the temple of Jerusalem! Ahura, Jehovah, thou art mocked! All hail Bel-Marduk, lord of lords, god of gods! Now is my triumph complete, the Jews imprisoned, a Prince of Persia within my hands! Drink, citizens, drink with me!" He raised a sacred vessel to his lips.

The Babylonians in their turn raised the sacred vessels to their lips. A shout arose, "All hail to Bel-Mar—" It was cut by Zillah's cry, rising above the revelry, "Behold, Jehovah is not mocked!"

Every eye followed her trembling finger.

On the wall, just behind one of the immense candlesticks which had been snuffed out at the king's command, the tapestry had been pulled back, and on the plaster appeared in letters the height of a man's arm the words "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHAR-SIN," written in a greenish flame that smoked and shimmered its whole dread length. Nor was this all: as they watched, a hand, luminous as the fateful words, put the last stroke upon the final letter and disappeared.

Belshazzar paled, trembled, clutched at the table for support as he gazed in frozen silence at the glowing words. Slowly he turned, swallowed, mutely faced his lords who stared back at him from blanched faces. Finding his voice

he bellowed, "A miracle, a miracle, straight from Marduk! Barossus, do thou step forward and interpret. The flaming words are not those of the Babylonians, nor yet those of the Chaldees."

Barossus stepped forward, stared, sank trembling to his knees, "O lord, live forever, they say — they say —" Terror made him inarticulate.

Belshazzar smote the table with his fist, "Thou art but a trickster! Let the astrologers step forth!"

Three men of dignified mien came before him, "O mighty king, we read the stars, the words on yon wall have no meaning for us," their leader stated.

"Is there none to interpret?" cried the king; then, as if to sharpen wisdom, "Whosoever shall read this writing and show me the interpretation thereof shall be clothed with scarlet and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom!"

But none replied. The gleaming letters still smoked upon the wall. A terror-stricken quiet reigned in the immense banquet hall. All were anxious to leave, yet stirred not, held immobile both because of fear of the king and awe of the flaming message.

Then Ubartu touched Belshazzar's robe, "There is a man in thy kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, light and understanding and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods was found in him; whom the king made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans and soothsayers."

"His name?" asked the king eagerly.

"Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation."

"Daniel, the Jew? Never!" thundered the king.

"Bring Daniel or we are lost!" clamored the guests. "He knoweth many tongues!"

Grudgingly Belshazzar gave the order, his eyes still glued to the flaming legend.

SOON feet sounded in the corridor, and two soldiers came escorting Daniel. The king, who knew not of the escape of the prophet and the other prisoners, looked with amazement upon his clean and orderly robe which should have been smeared with dungeon filth. Cries of wonder arose from the guests.

"I am here, O king, what wouldst thou with me?" he asked with simple dignity.

Belshazzar strove to meet that steady eye with but varying success. "I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom."

Then Daniel answered. His voice was low, yet it could be heard to the farthest corner of the immense hall: "Let thy gifts be to thyself and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king and make known the interpretation."

Then he told the tale of the humbling of Nebuchadnezzar which all Babylon knew so well, and so intent were the king and his guests upon it that they noted not the departure of Zillah and Ardavan. Then Daniel pointed his finger at Belshazzar:

"And thou, his son, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have

brought the vessels of His house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, and thy concubines have drunk wine from them, and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, and brass, iron, wood and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."

The gaunt old hand now pointed to the lambent letters, and every eye focused upon them, every breath was held in strained silence.

"And this is the writing that was written—" As he spoke another wonder! As a slave crept near the giant candlestick and set its wick alight, the words faded from view, but Daniel continued, "'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.' This is the interpretation: 'Mene, God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. 'Tekel', thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting. 'Peres', which is to say, 'Upharsin', thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Groans of terror broke from the lords of Babylon. "Ishtar, Marduk, save us from the wrath of Jehovah!"

Belshazzar laughed raucously. "By Marduk, thou art brave, my lily livered lords! 'Tis but a clever bit of word juggling. But none shall say Belshazzar is less true of promise than the Medes and Persians. Let the chain and the robe be brought. And a chair placed beside me." A sneering smile lit his features. "A cup of wine. All hail the new prince! As for thee, Daniel, Prince of the Jews, if thou hast prophesied amiss—" He left the sentence unfinished, turned to the bewildered guests, "It is past the hour of midnight, I go to my couch, come, my—" He paused, amazed, "Where is she?" he bellowed,

"And that rascally spy, what has been done with him? I gave no orders!"

Soldiers and guests were dumb with amazement. They shuffled uneasily. Another miracle! Ubartu spoke, "They left through the door. I would have warned thee, but the message held me spellbound."

"Trickery! Treachery!" snarled Belshazzar drawing his sword, "Thrice has that driveling poet defied me! This time will I attend to him myself! The feast is o'er. Each man to his home, and Anu take the hindmost! Let six of the guard follow me!"

Glad of the permission, guests hurriedly left that hall of miracles. Achsah drew her veil over her face and followed the king.

CHAPTER XI

Babylon Is Fallen

BUT, ere the guests could reach the stairway, a messenger dripping with blood, staggered up the steps, fell on the priceless rugs, crawled toward the empty throne, "All is lost!" he gasped, "Babylon is fallen—is fallen!" With arms outstretched toward the dais, he fell forward and died.

At this instant his dying cry was heard, echoing and re-echoing outside, "Babylon is fallen! All hail Cyrus the Great! Hail Darius the Mede!" While it still resounded, a second messenger on horseback rode up the broad stairway into the banquet hall:

"Save yourselves! The city has been betrayed, the Persians are at the outer defences of the palace!"

As if to give emphasis to his words, there was a crash outside that made the palace shiver. The canopy swayed from the tumult. A cry of dismay arose from

a thousand throats, and there was no king to lead the lords of Babylon to the combat. Wine cups fell to the floor from nerveless hands, their contents spilling upon the priceless rugs as each, panic in his heart, sought escape. A rush of feet, a battle-cry, the loudest yet, and in swept the hordes of Darius the Mede, led by Darius himself, all muddy, dripping from their wade through the waters of the Euphrates, which ran hip deep at the south gate.

Many a lord drew his sword, but ere he could rush upon the enemy, the voice of Daniel rang out clear and calm, "Peace! Draw not thy weapons! The Medes and Persians are merciful to the conquered!"

"Ay!" came the voice of Darius, "Draw not thy swords and thy lives shall be spared! I swear it, and the word of a Mede is unbreakable! The city of Bel-Marduk is no more. No longer will God be mocked. Lay down thy arms and hail the Lord of Lords, Ahura the great!"

The lords of Babylon, white of countenance, gazed questioningly at one another, trying to reach decision. The silence was sharp as the tumult had been. Then, sounding through the night, from a great distance, came the blast of war trumpets, the shouts of battle. Daniel spoke:

"'Tis useless, my lords, to draw sword. Spill not blood needlessly. Even now Cyrus and his army of the north enter by the west sand gates. Thus is the prophecy fulfilled, 'Babylon is given to the Medes and Persians.' Lords of Babylon, I command thee in the name of Jehovah, surrender thy arms!"

With heads bowed in sorrow, the lords of Babylon, sobered by the calamity, silently marched before his throne

chair, and deposited their arms at the feet of Daniel.

"Now for the king!" shouted Darius, "Which way went he?"

Daniel pointed, "He pursued the bard and the Jewish maid."

"Follow me!" commanded Darius. "Not till Belshazzar is taken is Babylon fully in our hands!" With clatter of arms, Darius and ten of his men strode through the eastern door through which Ardavan and Zillah had departed.

Ubartu threw her mantle over her face: "My son, O my beloved," she mourned, "Bel is dead! O god of the Jews, how greatly hast thou triumphed!"

CHAPTER XII

Lost in the Palace

WHEN Ardavan and Zillah slipped through the long corridor which led to many other passages, he whispered, "Hasten, thy father awaits thee in the Hall of the Women. I must leave thee with him and depart to guide a company of men in an attack on the rear of the palace!"

Zillah's trembling hand sought his, "Then it was my father's hand that wrote—"

"Ay, as I rode toward the city this night, Ahura showed me the use of the fiery liquid; I rode to your father—"

"The Lord showed its use as my father said!" exclaimed Zillah joyfully, "The Lord is mighty to save."

"Ay, it served to break the morale of the lords of Babylon as I planned. The news of the miracle spread like mist before the sun. But haste, I must away!"

They reached the Hall of the Women, but Asa was not there.

"He has lost his way!" exclaimed Ardavan. "I dare not leave thee!"

"Do thy duty, I can look out for myself. Point the way and I will flee to my own home," replied Zillah.

"Nay, the street is full of drunken revelers, and I hear not the blast of Darius' war horns that was to tell me he is within the gates. Can aught be amiss?"

Even as he spoke there was the sound of hurrying feet, the rattle of a sword, and Achsah's voice rang out, "'Tis here they went, I can smell the woman's perfume!"

Too late for escape! Belshazzar was upon them! Running down the narrow corridor brandishing his sword, he made a swift lunge at Ardavan, "Have at thee, bard," he snarled, "I'll cut out thy liver and feed it to the ravens!"

Then each fought for his life in that dimly lighted narrow passageway, a woman at his back. With cords outstanding on his dark forehead, and grooves of wrath bracketing his mouth, the king rushed to the attack, his mighty arms rounded by the distention of his muscles.

"Thy carcass shall ache the bellies of the jackals!" countered Ardavan.

Sword crashed against sword. Sparks flashed. The two women stood spell-bound, and each prayed for her man.

Ardavan, when he felt the mighty force of Belshazzar's arm, knew he had met a master. But not for nothing had he been taught by that great swordsman, Lurasp, in his native Persian mountains. Hungrily he met the attack with swift and savage countering. Belshazzar had the advantage of greater weight, but was handicapped by the shortness of breath that comes of riotous living, nor was he as rapid on his feet. Ardavan was a mountain climber, a chasm leaper. With the

swiftness of a magician's hand his flying feet wove an intricate pattern on the tiled floor as he pressed his dancing sword point toward his opponent's heart. Blood dripped from a gaping wound in the king's side; Ardavan's sword arm was injured.

"I'll carve thee into ribbons!" panted Belshazzar, his face beading with sweat.

With weakening wrist, Ardavan parried the king's slashing, sharp edged blows. He said nothing. Let the monster rant himself breathless!

But the king was cunning as a fox—he maneuvered Ardavan around till his back was to the wall. "Ha, take that!" Straight for Ardavan's heart lunged the sword.

Achsah gave a triumphant cry; Zillah caught her breath.

"Swish!" sang the sword as it leaped to its quarry, but Ardavan swayed from under its murderous point, and it broke in half as it turned against the wall.

Belshazzar gazed blankly at the broken haft in his hand, threw it over his shoulder. He breathed brokenly, his face pale, polished with sweat, but it was the sweat of exhaustion, not fear. "Strike!" he commanded, "Marduk is no more! Ahura wins!"

ARDAVAN forbore to strike. "My Persian and Greek ancestry forbid my killing a disarmed foe!" He flung his sword behind him. "Defend thyself, O King!" With a mighty leap he was on Belshazzar.

"To be beaten and then spared by a dog of a poet!" grunted Belshazzar as he met the attack by hugging Ardavan to him. Here was another chance, he would make the most of it. The lust of battle ran fierce in his veins.

Ardavan's fist flailed. He tried grimly to floor the king, but Belshazzar was slippery with sweat, and the blows merely rocked him as they slid off. With a terrific effort, Ardavan broke away, stood teetering on his toes, his weight on his left foot, ready to charge.

At that moment footsteps came pounding down the corridor from either end, and two groups of soldiers descended upon them, ten of Belshazzar's men at this back, as many more of Darius' soldiers behind Ardavan. In the momentary pause Achsah stooped, arose, thrust in to Belshazzar's hand the broken sword point.

"Use the woman as a shield!" she cried.

Belshazzar seized Zillah, and, holding her in front of him, the broken weapon at her heart, began retreating down the narrow hall backed by his own men.

"Hail Bel-Marduk!" he shouted, "The king is not yet dead! Come on, Persians, but thou comest at the peril of this maid. Poet, I will yet have thy beloved!"

The short respite had served to let Ardavan catch his breath. His mighty cry of rage echoed and reechoed as he flung himself forward, grabbed both Zillah and Belshazzar about the knees, jerked their feet from under them. The King fell with a heavy thud, and Zillah, her fall broken by the body of Belshazzar, rolled free, scrambled to her feet. Belshazzar lay as he had fallen, stunned. So swift had been events that neither faction moved.

Suddenly the halls echoed with the cry, "Zillah, daughter, where art thou?" and Asa, his eyes wide with anxiety, came hurriedly forward.

"Father!" cried the girl and rushed to his arms.

Darius now stepped forward, "Greetings, wise physician: Mayest thou live long to bless the land! We will see that thou art properly honored for this night's work. It kept the lords of Babylon so occupied that they knew not that we had surrounded the palace."

"Ha!" exclaimed Achsah, "So it was thou and no miracle? I thought I recognized thy claw as it wrote upon the wall! The tip of the little finger is gone!"

"'Tis true, daughter," said Asa gently, "that it was my hand that wrote upon the wall, but, 'tis none the less a miracle in that Jehovah let me discover the liquid fire, and that Ardavan was led by Him to think of the plan of writing upon the wall, and thus put it to good use in delaying Belshazzar and saving my child from dishonor."

Darius stood under the dim light. "Many wonders does Ahura perform for them who are righteous in his sight. Couldst thou find it in thy heart, Asa, the healer, to aid this low lying monarch whose life ebbs away from the wound in his side?"

In reply Asa knelt at Belshazzar's side, removed bandages and drugs from his ever ready bag and began staunching the wound. The king stirred, opened his eyes.

Achsah, who had thought of him with hatred, now that he lay dying, forgot his taunts and gibes, flung herself to her knees beside him, but Belshazzar turned his head away, "Achsah, thou hast ever been my evil demon. I forgive thee as I hope Zillah forgives me." Zillah knelt, placed her hand upon the King's forehead. "Can I do less than my father? I forgive thee freely."

"That is well," sighed Belshazzar, and closed his eyes in death.

With a wail of despair, Achsah stooped, kissed the king's brow, turned to Zillah: "Thy prophecy is fulfilled, daughter of Zion—no more shall man look on me with love!" So saying, she drew her veil over her face and ran swiftly down the corridor.

In silence the soldiers of Belshazzar made a bier of their crossed hands and bore their monarch back to the banquet room, laid him upon the head table, among the overturned sacred vessels his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from Jerusalem, and whose holiness he had so recently desecrated, and there was only his aged grandmother, Ubartu, to mourn over him. Thus occurred the death of Belshazzar and the down-fall of Babylon.

CHAPTER XIII

Peace

FOUR years later, on the roof of Asa the healer, long since passed to his reward, sat two women. Playing about among the potted palms and flowers were two lovely children, a boy and a girl.

"Why doesn't he come, Adah? See, the rain sinks, and he is not yet here."

"Never yet hath he failed thee," consoled Adah.

"No," conceded Zillah, "and there is much at the court of Daniel to detain him. But tell me, what sawest thou in the market place this morning?"

"I saw the river dotted with *kufas* from the north laden with garden stuff for the feast of the marriage mart tomorrow."

"And what didst thou hear? Surely there was gossip?"

"Ay, rumor saith that the tax levy

will be but one half that of last year, and that there is not a pauper in the whole city."

"And what of Daniel?"

"Daniel still prevails, though he pleads for rest as he is old. Ever since he came unharmed from the lion's den, none can oppose him with the people, for it is due to his wise rule that there is joy in the land."

At this moment there was a step upon the stairs, and Ardavan, older, but with the same beauty and grace of his early years, came upon the roof. Lifting the joyous little girl to his shoulders, and grabbing the laughing boy up under his arm, he swung them both down onto the couch and turned to his wife.

"Zillah, my beloved!"

"Ardavan, my prince!" She hid her head upon his breast, then drew him down to the couch, rested her head against his shoulder, swept her hand idly across her harp. "Dost thou remember, beloved, that on this night four years ago, the night before the marriage mart, we sat thus and sang of love?"

"Ay, and on this night did Asa, God rest his soul, discover the fiery liquid the secret of which went with him to his grave."

"Ay, and on this same night did Achsah betray thee in the garden and thou didst secure the papyrus that, given to Cyrus, led to the down-fall of Babylon. What became of her?"

"She went to a muddy grave in the Euphrates. Thy prophecy was fulfilled, beloved, no man again looked upon her with love."

"Poor woman, wickedness is its own punishment," said Zillah.

"Ay," assented Ardavan, "and thus

does the Lord reward righteousness; as the sun sinks to-night behind the rim of the desert, we sit in peace and sing of love and gratitude." He took the harp, and over the roof tops of Babylon, his clear tenor floated:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters—"

The children came closer, leaned against his knee; he continued:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

And, as the melody died away, householders on their roofs paid heed and whispered, "'Tis the friend of the wise and mighty Daniel! Listen, 'tis Ardavan, Bard of Babylon!"



The Stone Ship

"H. M. S. DIAMOND ROCK" is the only rock in the world to be used as a regular though stationary ship of war. On top of the lonely sea-washed pinnacle rising abruptly from the ocean's floor to a height of six hundred feet above the shimmering surface of the Caribbean Sea, a mere handful of British Bluejackets defended their country's rights and property. The gallant men withstood the pangs of loneliness, the longing for contact with their countrymen, news of their homes, hunger and privation and successfully resisted each and every attempt to dislodge them from their stone ship until their resources were utterly and completely exhausted.

A few miles off the southern coast of the island of Martinique where the distant mountains of Saint Lucia rise hazily above the waters of the Strait separating the two islands, stands the perpendicular peak known as Diamond Rock. It is a natural and everlasting monument to the valiant men who were fortified there.

After gazing at the sheer, steep walls of Diamond Rock, it is almost impossible to believe that human beings could scale the towering cliff, much less hoist cannons, ammunition and food supplies to the summit of the fang-like peak. Yet, during the Eighteenth Century, when so many of the West Indian Islands were engaged in constant con-

flict with either one European nation or another, a few strong-hearted British seamen did accomplish that almost inhuman task.

The stone ship commanded the entire channel between Martinique and Saint Lucia and, needless to say, while the desperate men were in command of the situation, short work was made of any enemy vessel brave or foolhardy enough to venture within range of the cannons mounted atop the natural fortress.

This unique warship controlled the channel and freely exercised its authority, creating havoc among all resisting ships. The stone ship's crew continued to survive month after month until at last its brave men were forced to surrender because their ammunition and supplies were finally depleted.

England did not forget the gallantry of her brave Bluejackets. Each member of the little band had given his best, his all for his mother country. In token of the courageous feat and to commemorate the service to England of the Bluejackets and the rock, the lonely crag was given a title. It was enrolled in the official lists of the British Admiralty as "H. M. S. Diamond Rock."

The Stone Ship is the most remarkable single rock in the West Indies and, possibly, in the entire world, because it is the only stationary rock ever to become a full-fledged man-of-war.

—M. D. Crehan

THE FIRE



"... and then she blew asunder, and up went barrier and Spaniards like the ashes cast from Aetna!"



by SEABURY QUINN

Illustrated by H. W. McCauley

CHAPTER I

How We Sailed to Luys

THE wind which blew across the Zuyder Zee was bitter as a curse as I and great Black Hassan tramped the mole that fringed the town of Zeadyn. "Wah, by the hairs of Allah's beard, ya Sidi," swore the Black One, "this weather likes me not." He stamped his feet right lustily on the paving-blocks and drew his cloak of heavy frieze more tightly round him. "They lie who say that Shaitan's hell is filled with fire; 'tis filled with icy blasts the like of this, and mayhap as fully peopled with the Dutchmen as this cursed town. Come, let us heave the anchor up and put to sea, ya bibi; there's loot to take upon the southern ocean and Spanish throats to cut, nor need we perish in this——"

"Be silent, O thou great uncouthness," I berated him. "Thou hast pig's

ears. We've taken service with the Dutchmen and sworn to do our office faithfully. Are we then unbelieving dogs to break our plighted word so lightly?"

"O Allah," prayed the Black One, what time his teeth were rattling one against another with the winter chill. "O Thou All-Powerful! O Master of the World!"

But even as he mouthed his chattering prayer, behold a messenger dight in the Governor's livery came running in hot haste and stopped before me and did off his cap of fur. "Haste thee, Don Carlos," he spake with panting breath, "his Excellency would have speech with thee, and that right quickly."

"Go tell his Excellency we come anon," I answered, and hastened forthwith to our ship, the *Santa Isabella* which we used for barracks, to tire me in my clothes of ceremony.

I donned my suit of black with pearl embroidery, and drew tall boots of Spanish leather on my legs and gloves of black upon my hands, wore for body armor only a cuirass of sable steel blazed with a tiger's head in silver on the front; then last of all I clapped my black-plumed hat upon my head, draped over my shoulders my rich cloak of tigerskin with scarlet satin lining, and hung my simitar against my thigh. Black Hassan dight him in his sable Moorish armor and wound a turban of red silk about his peaked steel cap, while Nuno Cabral, as became a simple soldier, was clothed in garments of black leather, all gleaming with fresh oil, and Luiz Castro, my small orderly, attired him in hose and jerkin of bright green with a brazen gorget at the throat and a small sword dangling at his side. Thus dight, we went with dignity to the Town House where his Excellency General van der Coopen, Governor of the city, warmed his gouty toes and eke his wrath before the fire which blazed within the council chamber.

"God's throne!" he swore when we were come before him, "methinks ye take a deal of time to answer summonses, Don de la Muerte."

Now at his words my cheeks went red, for to call a man by his surname encoupled with the title Don is deadly insult in the Spanish usage, since it implies that he is one who has no rightful name; and though I had no surname I could call mine own, since Moormen have them not, I needed no fat lard-ball of a Dutchman to remind me of it.

"*Yahudi*——!" I answered; then: "Do we meet here to change insults or talk of military matters, good Mynheer?" I asked, for though he was a swinish lout he was also the Governor of the city, and as such the man from whom I took my orders.

The Dutchman wallowed in his cushioned chair like any pig within its sty, and, "I am minded that ye go to Luys with all speed," he told me. "Our spies have brought us word that the Spaniards are preparing to assault the town, and it must be held at any costs. The walls are strong, the place is well supplied with food, but the garrison is weak, only six or seven hundred of our people being there, besides a regiment of German mercenaries. Maitland and his English are advancing to the town by land, and Prince Maurice sends to ask our help. Alas! we have no soldiers we can spare except your own tried force, Captain Carlos. Therefore it is my will and pleasure that ye go at once, sailing up the Zinn before the Spanish barricade the stream, and taking with ye such provisions as we have to spare to aid the garrison in standing off the siege."

I teased the points of my mustachios 'twixt my thumb and finger while I made a hasty calculation. "'Twill be a thousand florins, in advance," I told him when my figuring was done.

"Body o' Judas! A thousand florins, quotha?" roared the Governor. "Ye're mad, my Moorish cockerel—if a Moor ye be indeed. Wot ye not that ye have taken service with the Stadts and pledged to serve by an indentured deed, and for your service ye receive five hundred gilders every month, whilst your men are paid a good hard dollar every day? 'Tis more than ye are worth, for though ye've been within our town a semester ye've had but one brush with the foe, whilst your wages have been paid right punctually. What can ye say to that, my fine young contract-breaker?"

"Why, certes, you are entitled to our services by covenant," I answered him,

"but your deed says naught about my ship, the *Santa Isabella*. We're indentured to the Stadts to fight on land or sea and furnish our equipment, but we have not bargained to supply the ships, nor yet to bear your loads of food and ammunition for ye. If cargo-carriers ye would have us be, ye'll pay our rates, or find another ship to take provisions unto Luys."

He railed and haggled like a Jew in the bazar, but the finish of the matter was he met our terms, and the next day we set forth for Luys, our hold well stuffed with food and ammunition, and the imprecations of Mynheer the Governor ringing in our ears.

CHAPTER II

How We Met the Jufvrouw van Ziel

THREE days we wrestled with the raging sea, scarce making steerage way as we lurched along under close-reefed topsails, foremast staysail and trysail, topgallant yards on deck and topgallant mast struck. The morning of the fourth day of our voyage the wind and sea were quieted, and we durst let out our topsail reefs, whereat the good ship forged ahead as though she knew she had been loitering on the way, and must e'en make haste to end her journey in good time.

It was about two bells of the forenoon watch when our lookout shouted, "Sail ho!" and when Nuno Cabral, who had in charge the larboard watch, inquired where away, the answer came that it showed on our starboard bow about a half a league ahead. I took my spy-glass—as fine a piece of work as ever Leyden craftsmen made — and clambered up the ratlines, for we were sailing through a troubled sea and every craft we met might be an enemy. And enemy she was, as I could plainly

tell by her high bow and poop, her clumsy, massive rigging and the broadness of her beam. A Spanish merchantman of some eight hundred tons, but a Spaniard who had lately come to grief, for her topmast was clean gone and she lay rolling helplessly, with a horrid mess of wreckage trailing overside.

"Is it storm or fight belike, your Excellency?" Nuno Cabral asked as he finished squinting through the brass tube of the sea-glass. "Certes, whatever be the cause of her mishap, 'twas no small thing, for——"

"Sail ho!" sang out the lookout once again.

"Where away?" cried Nuno Cabral.

"Dead ahead, about a league away, with all sail set and making for us with all speed!"

Once more I mounted to the cross-trees, with Nuno Cabral and Black Hassan at my heels, and there we saw the other ship, a long, low craft, rigged as a barkentine, her hull coal-black, her port-lids bloody red.

"Now, by São Francisco's holy halo, she can sail," quoth Nuno Cabral as the black craft winged toward us like a sea-bird skimming over the waves. And:

"By Allah and by Allah, look, *ya Sidi!*" Hassan bade me with a roar of laughter. "They take us for another Spaniard—see, their flag!"

And even as he spake the other vessel broke her colors from the main truck; a square of sable with a grinning skull and crossed thigh-bones worked on it in white.

It was easy to account for their mistake. Having finished with one Spanish merchantman, they saw us heave across the sky and took us for her consort, for the *Santa Isabella*, lately taken from the Dons, was Spanish as his Catholic

Majesty's own self, to all appearances, even to the effigies of saints and saintesses painted on her sails.

"*Wallah*, dead man, laugh whilst ye may!" great Hassan chuckled gleefully. "Ere long we'll make thee grin another way, by God's own head. Shall I call the men to quarters, *Sidi*?"

"Stealthily," I ordered. "'Tis a rope's end for the one who shows his head above the bulwarks ere I give command."

Like any ape the Black One slid adown the rigging, and a moment later came the shrilling of his pipe. Anon the guns were double-charged with solid shot, and every man was in his place beside them, whilst by the rail there crouched a double score of sturdy musketeers, armed not with their accustomed pieces, but with those great, bell-mouthed guns which Dutchmen call the *donderbus* or thunder-box, and which, when charged with slugs and iron scrap and rusty nails, scatter their loads right famously.

"Bear down the muzzles of your guns," I sent the word to those who waited in the 'tween-decks. "The pirate craft is lower than we be, and no shot must go over her."

AND now the black ship came upon us. Disdaining to discharge a gun, she swept alongside, and from my station on the poop I saw her crew of seventy or more sea-devils, athirst for blood and straining at the leash like any pack of savage hounds before the chase begins. So then I lifted up my trumpet and called out:

"What if we yield, Sir Pirate? We've mighty store of metal in our hold, and we will gladly give it to ye if ye'll spare our lives."

I saw the corsair captain draw his

sword and point it toward our rail, and:

"Why should we spare your lives in trade for metal, Master Craven," he called back, "since we shall take them both anon?"

"Sayest thou so, by Allah's infinite compassion?" I answered him. "Then take the metal first!" Whereat I raised my hand to great Black Hassan and he blew on his pipe, and from our ports ran out twelve eighteen-pounder carronades, while the long thirty-two which we had shipped on transverse slides amidships thrust forth her red-rimmed snout, and from the mighty battery belowered forth a salvo of salute the like of which had not been heard upon that sea in many tides.

Straight down into the pirate's decks went some of our round shot, whilst others cut his masts away as clean as any ax, and the rest clave through his sides, dismounting half his guns. And with a mighty shout my musketeers were on their feet, resting their *donderbusses* on the rail for greater surety in aim and hurling such a charge of iron scrap into the faces of his hellion crew that more than half of them fell dead ere they could hear the roaring of the shots that struck them down.

And now, his dreadful mace upreared like the scythe of Death, Black Hassan clambered over the bulwarks and dropped upon the pirate's deck. "*Ya Muslimin!*" rang his rallying cry, and half a hundred sturdy rogues with ax and pike and sword and pistolet swarmed after him, and "Carlos, Carlos; *Tigre, Tigre!*" sounded loud the slogan as they brake upon the pirate's knavish horde like the flood-tide breaking on a child's sand-castle on the beach.

The fight was scarce a fight. Surprised and all dismayed at the terror of our broadside when they had thought

resistance would be weak, half their number dead before a blow was struck, the pirates were no match for those mighty men of valor who pressed in great Black Hassan's wake, and had I not commanded that the trumpet sound, they all had perished underneath the storm of steel which Hassan led across their deck.

"Bring them aboard," I ordered as I left my place beside the tiller, "and line them by the mainmast. Then do ye search their hold and put whatever ye find upon the deck for distribution 'mongst the men."

A MIGHTY store of loot was lifted over the rail. Gold in coins and chains and cunningly wrought images, great cups of gold for churchly use, thick-set with gems of purest water, candlesticks and crucifixes, vestments for the Spanish priests which were so weighted down with gold and jewels that I marveled much that any man could stand beneath their weight, were stacked in glittering heaps upon our decks amidships, while baser stuffs, still precious in the marketplace, there were in such profusion that fain had I thought the world's bazars were emptied out before us. Fine silken cloth, and cloth of finest wool, muslin fit to veil the faces of the Sultan's favorite wives, laces out of France, and cunningly wrought books of finest parchment, all bound in leather of Morocco with gold and gems for ornament, stacked at greater height than a tall man could reach up with a pike-staff, and in addition there was wine of France and wine of Spain, wine from Portugal and from the islands of Canary, and great, fat kegs of rum and brandy from the vats of Italy and France and the islands of the Caribbee,

enough to make a thousand Christians drunk for half a year, it seemed.

And whilst we stood and gloated over the booty, behold, Black Hassan came aboard with one so wondrous fair that I was fain to catch my breath at sight of her. Golden as the fields of ripened wheat her hair was, and blue as summer skies her eyes, while her skin was white as petals from the rose-bloom, and her shape such that the pious monks of Christendom, who eschew the love of woman as a sin, might well forget their vows at sight of her.

"Now, by the glorious name of Allah, what dost thou amongst this pack of mangy curs, O heart of seven thousand roses?" I demanded when they set the maid before me. And:

"Sir, whom have I the honor of addressing?" she asks me, whereat I touched my hand against my brow and lips and breast in courtly Moorish fashion and replied:

"Sergeant Major in the Field Carlos de la Muerte, in the service of the Stadts General, and now upon his way to Luys with reinforcements for the garrison."

"Oh, gracious heaven be praised!" the little maid brake in, what time she clasped her hands as though in prayer. "I am the Jufvrouw Elsa van Ziel, daughter to Councillor Deyke van Ziel, of the town of Luys. Two days ago we—my father and myself—sailed from London, where he had been upon a mission for the Stadts, but on our way we were beset by storms, and our ship, dismantled, was picked up by the Spanish vessel *San Angelo*. Our crew and sailing-master the Spaniards put to death, but my father and I were passengers and people of importance, and so were destined for Spain and the dungeons of the Inquisition. But the same storm



that wrecked our ship blew the Spaniard from his course, and early in the morning these pirates set upon him, and——” She stopped her tale for very sobbing, then, turning from me, faced the pirate captain where he stood in bonds before the mast.

“**M**URDERER! I brand thee murderer!” she cried, and as she spake she held her pointed finger toward him, as though it had been a weapon. Anon, to me:

“Good Heer Carolus, wilt thou do me justice?” she enquired. “I am an orphan, motherless from birth, now doubly orphaned by this scoundrel’s wickedness; for this very day he took my father’s life before my eyes for that I would not condescend to mate with him and be his mistress. Wilt thou have pity on the fatherless, and give me full requital of my wrongs, Heer Carolus?”

“Now, by the Prophet’s beard—on him the salute!—I’ll right thy wrongs right willingly, so far as justice can accomplish it,” I answered. “Say on, Mistress. Pronounce thy judgment on these pirate dogs, and as thou sayest, so shall it be with them.”

Now, at my words the pirate chief turned craven, for that was in the maiden’s eyes which told no tale of mercy, and he, who could inflict the horriddest of deaths, had but small stomach for the medicine he dealt, nathless.

“My father he made walk the plank,” she told me whilst her gentle, dove-like eyes were hot with hate. “Wilt thou not do the same by them, Heer Carolus?”

I had no need to answer, for at her

“Murderer! I brand thee murderer!” she cried.

words Black Hassan had bestirred himself, and under his command a brace of soldiers bore a goodly plank amidships and lashed it to the rail. And now we bound the pirates' eyes with bandages, and one by one we prodded them upon their last walk to eternity. Some went haltingly, feeling for every little mite of foothold till the end was reached, then hung there seeking to delay their plunge into the deep by one small second; these we thrust across the final step with the halberd's point. Some took the little journey at a shambling run, as though they would have done with it eftsoon.

And as his lousy crew went to their doom the captain of the sea-ghouls cried and wept and begged for pity, calling on the gentle Christ whose ways he had foresworn long since, to pardon him his sins, crying for his mother and his father, as though their souls could come and comfort him in his extremity, gnashing his teeth against his lips until he spewed out bloody froth, and ever anon beseeching the fair maid that she would have him hanged or shot or stabbed to death, but that she would relent and say he need not walk the plank.

But ever she did hear his pleas with stony, cold-eyed silence, save when she asked him finally: "Didst thou show mercy to my father?"

And now his turn was come. Tears of self-pity and of cowardice streaming down his cheeks beneath the blindfold, he clung to the plank's edges with his toes as though he were a monkey walking on a stick. Inch by slow, tortured inch he felt his way along, crying in a voice that cracked with terror that we show him mercy. At last he reached the end. A foot advanced touched nothing underneath him, he

stumbled in his blindness, then toppled forward, his arms flung wide as though he had been crucified against the air. There came a last despairing scream, a splash, and silence, save when the water licked against the *Santa Isabella's* sides, as though it craved more feeding.

There was no time to make a proper burying of those upon the battle-riven Spanish ship. Besides, there was none on her save those members of the crew who fell in vain resistance to the pirates. Therefore we stripped her of the little which the sea-robbers had left and put the torch to her, standing by until she sank beneath the waves in a cloud of hissing steam. Then once again we set our prow toward Luys.

CHAPTER III

How We Withstood the Siege

RIGHT gayly rang the steeple-bells and loud the people cheered when we were come to Luys, for already had the Spanish host begun to draw its cordon round the walls upon the landward side, overwhelming the redoubts and forts which made the first line of defence, and well the people knew the foe would close the Zinn as quickly as his siege materials were set upon the land, whereafter there would be small hope of men or provender to help them stand the enemy away.

Especially grateful to me was the worthy Councillor Deyke van Deyke, uncle to the beauteous Jufvrouw van Ziel, who now must stand her in a father's stead, and the young Mynheer Martin van Aert, her affianced husband. At the houses of these two we needs must stay some time, and we were entertained right regally, though the amazement of our hosts at seeing that I and Hassan drank no wine was equalled only by their astonishment at

the prodigious drafts which Nuno Cabral quaffed.

Betimes there was a goodly wedding in the minster, and I and all my officers attended, and it was hard to say at which the great attendance gaped most wonderingly, the fair young bride in gown of shining white with a veil of lace thick-sewn with pearls which I bestowed upon her, or me in my fine cloak of tigerskin and mighty Hassan in his coal-black armor with his great mace balanced on his shoulder and his white teeth flashing in his ebon face.

But now the siege began in earnest. Duke Alberto, who led the Spanish forces, had under him twelve thousand men and more than fifty pieces of ordnance. The city's garrison was but a scant six hundred Hollanders, a company of four hundred German mercenaries under Colonel Heinrichs, my own troop and Maitland's English, a regiment of some six hundred dragoons. Natheless, we were ensconced behind strong walls, and what we lacked in numbers we made up in fire and spirit.

Duke Alberto set his demi-cannon off against a salient in the town wall, battering persistently at it, and soon the great flint blocks and walls of brick began to show the marks of shot. "By heaven," Colonel Maitland swore when we were met in council, "unless a way to stop that cannonade is found, he'll breach the wall as sure as God has mercy on us sinful mortals!"

"Hast aught to say, Don Carlos?" asked the Governor.

"Yea, that have I," I answered. "To-night, one hour after dark, let a great bonfire be set off across the town from where the Duke his batteries are planted. Then let there be a great to do, with ringing bells and blaring horns

and much loud shouting, as though a portion of the town were burning and the people in a panic. This will distract the Spaniards, and while they gape with wonder, I and my command shall sally forth beneath the walls and take them unawares."

And as I planned it, it was done. A mighty pyre of wood and pitch and oily chips and shavings was erected in a public square, and when all was dark the match was set to it, so that the flames and smoke mounted upward in a mighty roar. Then those who had the task in hand ran through the streets and shouted "Fire!" whereat the townsfolk rushed in panic out of doors and cried aloud for very terror.

While this was toward I spied upon the Spanish earthworks with my glass, and saw their troops in hot debate concerning whether the great conflagration would excuse them from the work of battering down the walls. Then at my signal my brave fellows issued from the sally-port, and crept across the frozen marsh which lay between us and the Spanish works. So silently went we that they were not aware that we were near till with a mighty shout we charged, paused for a moment at the rampart rim to fire a volley in their faces, then with pike and sword and ax and bayonet leapt into their trenches, cutting down the bombardiers, overturning gabions and driving heavy spikes of iron down the touch-holes of their guns. Then last of all we took the powder from their magazine and heaped it close against their earthworks, set a slow-match to it and scampered back to shelter 'neath the walls.

"God's wounds," swore Colonel Maitland the next day, "it is a shame that thou art not an Englishman, Don Car-

los, for that was bravely done! 'Twill be a good ten days afore they can repair the damage to their works, and reaming out a well-spiked gun is no child's-play, God wot."

BUT still the siege went on. Despairing of the task of blowing down the walls, the Duke began a fierce assault, for he was reinforced by twenty companies of foot; and though we stood them off with heavy slaughter, the fighting never ceased, the Spaniards coming on in close formation at one point and then another, fresh troops relieving those whom we hurled back, so that there was no rest for any one within the town, nor any surcease from the battle.

My company and Maitland's English watched together, the Germans and the Hollanders acting as relief. One evil, freezing night as we stood on the ramparts we heard the Spanish trumpets sounding the advance, and made us ready to repulse them, when from the street below the wall we heard a woman's hail.

"Now, God ha' mercy, Mistress, what do ye out in such a night, when fighting is beginning?" bellowed Colonel Maitland angrily; but:

"Softly, Master Englisher," the woman answered, and up the wooden stairs that led unto the battlements came Vrouw van Aert, she who had been Elsa van Zeil, whom I had rescued from the pirate. "I've organized a company of women," she informed us, "and we've come to aid ye in your work."

"Back, wench, back to your hearth and husband," blustered Maitland; but:

"Nay, hear what she may say," I begged him. "In olden days, as I've heard tell, the women took their place

beside the men when fighting was afoot. The Prophet knows we can use extra hands this night."

"Aye, mayhap thou'rt right," growled Maitland. "What is your purpose, Mistress?"

She signalled to her petticoated soldiers and up they came upon the walls, each bearing some strange thing with her. There were great balls of yarn, as big as a man's head, each tightly rolled, and fastened to a length of string a clothyard's length. There were also rings of rope all wound with oil-soaked yarn, and bladders filled with oil.

"Now, what in Satan's name can these things be?" asked Colonel Maitland, but his answer came full soon when the Spaniards sought to place their ladders to the wall despite the fire our musketry poured on them. Right cunningly with flint and tinder-box the women set their balls of oil-soaked yarn aflame and hurled them blazing in the Spaniards' faces, so that those they struck with them fell shrieking from their ladders, the skin burned from their faces and their sight destroyed, and then they fell upon their fellows underneath, dragging them to earth, whereat our men overset the ladders utterly and slew the pikemen who would set them up again. The hoops of rope they also set ablaze, and cunningly as any child who plays at quoits they dropped them on the Spaniards' heads, so that the blazing chaplets clung about their necks and drove them screaming to wallow on the ground for very agony. The bladders full of oil were set alight and hurled among the charging ranks, scattering sheets of living flame amongst them. Never, I ween, had anything the like of that been met by those proud veterans of Spanish Philip's army. The fight

was short, and terrible. Burned, blinded, maimed, the Spaniards gave up the attack, nor had we lost a man in the defence.

"Now, by St. George, 'twas bravely thought of, Mistress," Colonel Maitland said. "May Satan take me quick if ever I speak slightly of women's war again."

But still the siege went on. In addition to their ring of forts about the landward side, the Dons had built a barrier across the River Zinn, so that there was no hope of succor from the sea, and food, which had been plentiful, began to shrink and vanish as the Dutchmen, maugre their besiegement, plied their ravenous appetites, and the stalwart burghers ate six meals a day, and every meal enough to feed a file of soldiers for a week.

CHAPTER IV

How We Schemed to Raise the Siege

THE springtime came and all the frozen marshland turned from icy gray to softly growing green. Beyond the camp which circled round the city the fields began to bloom, and underneath the walls, within a crossbow shot, the apple orchards burst into a blaze of snowy blossoming. The softened marshes made the enemy's assaults less bitter and less frequent, since he could not wade breast-deep to press to the attack, nor could he find firm earth for building of entrenchments. But ever the cannonading sounded in our ears, and ever stalked the gaunt, gray wolf of famine through the streets, so that faces which were round and fat and apple-cheeked when first we came to Luys were now grown long and gaunt and pale, and in the townsmen's eyes there shone the fever of despair where once there shone good spirit.

One morning as I trod the street to take my station on the ramparts a messenger came running from his Excellency the Governor with an urgent summons to attend a council at the Town House.

"Don Carlos," spake his Excellency when I had come before him, "we find ourselves in sore need of your wit again, for soothly guile is greatly needed in our present desperate case. I have," he told me as he opened up a sheet of thin-scraped parchment, "a pigeon-message from Prince Maurice, promising us aid within the fortnight—if we can but batter down the barrier which the Spaniards have erected in the Zinn. With thirteen ships the Prince's forces are prepared to sail to our relief, with food enow to serve us through the summer, perchance with men enough to raise the siege. What message can we send him in return?"

Now, I was never one to weigh my words, wherefore, since cheer was sorely needed by the town, I made my answer straightway: "Address his Highness with all speed," I bade, "and tell him that this day fortnight the barrier will be moved from out his way; therefore let his ships proceed at once, for we are very weary of starvation."

"And how wilt thou destroy the barricade, Messer Carlos?" asked Colonel Heinrichs, commander of the German mercenaries, who was a doughty fighter in the field, but dull of wit withal. "'Tis built of timbers twice the thickness of a stout man's body, and on it they have mounted carronades, so that any who come near it must be blown out of the water. I do not think a fleet of warships could assault it with success, so how can we——"

"Peace, Colonel Heinrichs," I brake in upon his protests, "I am Carlos de la



The women set their balls of oil-soaked yarn ablaze and hurled them blazing in the Spaniards' faces.

Muerte, called the Tiger, and where I seek a way, that way is opened to me." Thus spake I bravely to encourage them, but how I might make good my boast was more than I could tell.

Howbeit, I and Nuno Cabral and Black Hassan sat in council over the matter straightways, and thus our strategy was planned:

IN EVERY house within the town were quantities of feathers, for the Dutchmen dearly loved their ease and comfort, and were wont to sleep upon great mattresses of goose-down, with other mattresses stuffed with the same on top of them. So, with the aid of Vrouw van Aert, who was supreme commander of the women, we collected us great mountain-stacks of feather beds, and cut them open with all haste. The fluffy stuffings from the mattresses we doused with oil and lard till they would burn as freely as a candle-wick, emitting vasty clouds of dense and choking smoke the while.

Now, when this was done, we took from out the shipping by the water-gate three ketches and loaded them with oil-soaked feathers till they were like to sink, and when the night was come we towed them down the Zinn with rowboats until we came in cannon-shot of the wide barrier which the Spaniards had erected, and tying fast their tillers set them onward on the outward-rushing tides, their loads of feathers blazing bravely and giving off great clouds of smoke which made us hold our noses in disgust.

The Spaniards saw them coming and right hotly did they fire, but the crewless boats held on their way, and borne upon the tide they drifted down until their bowsprits pressed against the barrier. And though the stink of burning

feathers did no lasting harm, it caused them much unhappiness, for we heard them swear and curse as only Spaniards can, and some were coughing with the smoke, and some wept red-eyed when the fumes blew in their faces, while others were turned sick at scent of it and laid their muskets and gun-matches by while they were fain to lie upon the planking of the barrier and puke like any little lad who overstuffs himself with sweets and pasties.

"*Goot, goot, bei Gott!*" roared Colonel Heinrichs when he saw our work. "Thou hast given them a bad half-hour, Messer Carlos, but think'st thou that such impish tricks will wear their barrier down?"

"Dost think I have no other purpose than to plague them?" I replied, and waited for his word, for as one seasoned soldier thinks, so the rest are like to reason, and that this should be the thought of all was vital to my plan.

"Why, what else hast thou in mind?" he asked in all simplicity, "Surely, thou'rt not fool enough to think that veteran soldiers can be chased away by smoke and smells! 'Twas cunningly thought out, my lad, but as for effectiveness——"

"*Wah*, what knows a monkey of the taste of ginger?" great Black Hassan roared with laughter, and he and Nuno Cabral threw their arms about each other and danced like two trained bears who hear the showman's pipe.

And nightly after that, sometimes by one, sometimes by twos and threes, we sent our stink-boats down the river with the outward-flowing tide, and the Spanish soldiers on the barrier grew expectant of them and were wont to lie down flat upon the planking when the boats drew near, that the smoke might blow above their heads and cause them

little trouble. Nor, after the third night, did they so much as deign to fire a musket at the feather-laden barges.

But whilst this mild buffoonery was afoot, we worked at business still more serious. Selecting a stout-timbered ship from those at anchor in the basin, we filled her hold one-third with close-piled logs, so that she was like to float though pierced and pierced again with round shot at the waterline. Then on the piled-up timber we erected walls of brick set in cement, so that her wooden sides were made as strong as any fortress, and on her decks we laid a heavy pavement of stout tile and brick, to make her more impervious to fire withal.

Then barrel after barrel we bore powder to her hold, and knocked the heads from off the casks and stacked them one upon another till the brick-built walls between her decks were fairly bulged with ready gunpowder. And then upon her tile-paved decks we heaped a mighty stack of well-oiled feathers, letting half a dozen twisted powder-trains lead from them to the powder magazine below. And so we were all ready for the finish of our scheme.

"In three more days Prince Maurice's relief ships will be waiting at the river mouth," I told his Excellency, "and the barrier will be swept away ere they are ready to come unto us. My hand shall be the one to open up the way."

CHAPTER V

*How I Thrust my Head into the
Lion's Maw*

"**I**NSHALLAH—if God wills it," says the pious Moslem, and I had been the wiser had I then but held in memory the teachings of my youth. For whilst we strove with hand and

wit to hold the Spanish host outside the city walls, behold another enemy had passed our lines, an enemy against whose darts the hardest mail is soft, and who makes mock of pike and sword and musket.

The worthy Mynheer Johann van der Poort, the burgomaster of the town of Luys, had a daughter hight Lysbeth, a comely chit scarce turned her thirteenth summer, with flaxen hair and soft blue eyes, as pretty as a painted shepherdess upon a painted fan. When first we had paraded through the town she stood beside her sire and mother and her eyes grew larger yet and bright at sight of my fine tiger-cloak and the sable armor and the mighty mace of great Black Hassan; but when Luiz Castro, my small orderly, came marching by all dight in tawny coat and breeches, his black cuirass agleam and his cap of Moorish steel set rakishly upon his bright black curls, her heart, like any homing dove, went fluttering from her gentle breast to nestle 'neath his shiny corselet. Nor did she suffer Cupid's wound alone, for what must happen but the lad looks upward to the window where she stands, and sees the love-blush burning on her face, whereat his own took flame, and he stood and stared upon her stupidly, as though he were a Dutchman or a cow.

And from that moment he was well-nigh valueless to me. Did I send him in hot haste to bear a message to his Excellency the Governor, he was sure to find his homeward way through that same street where stood the worthy burgomaster's house, and when I sought him in his quarters on the ship and failed to find him there, I knew that he was surely sitting in his stockinged feet within the burgomaster's kitchen, looking at the little maid with all his

eyes as she performed her tasks, be-like attempting to assist her in her work, and making it ten times the harder with his clumsy efforts. And as I knew that this could not go on, I called him to me as I sat within my cabin on the *Santa Isabella*, and:

"Sergeant Castro," says I with greatest gravity, "there be a number of foul rogues within this town."

And, "Yes, your Worship, that is true," he answers me.

"And it is said a woman scarce is safe to venture out alone upon the streets," I told him seriously.

And, "Certainly, your Excellency, the Germans and the English are in sooth a rowdy lot, especially when drinking," he agrees.

"Hast heard that Mistress Lysbeth van der Poort has been accosted by these ruffian soldiers?" I demanded.

"*Santa Maria*, no!" he cries aghast.

"Has any dared to offer her affront—"

"Nay, Sergeant Castro," I brake in, "it has not come to such a pass as yet, but I was thinking . . . thinking . . ." and I left him in a deal of worryment as I forebore to tell him what it was I thought. And then, at length:

"Has it not seemed to you it might be well to set a guard upon the burgo-master's house?" I asked him. "A guard whose special duty it would be to see that naught amiss befalls the little Mistress Lysbeth when she ventures out into the streets? Such an one must needs be billeted within the house, and eat and sleep therein, nor could he take time from such duties to stand a watch upon the walls. It would be dreary work, my sergeant, a dull and tiring tour of duty, and I hesitate to name a man to do it. But if thou belike

canst tell me of a man to volunteer for such a task——"

The lad was off as though he were an arrow speeded from a bow, scarce waiting to salute me as a soldier should before he said farewell. And after that I knew where I could find young Castro when I sought him.

NOW, betwixt the town walls and the Spanish works upon the southward side there was a kind of no man's land where apple orchards had aforetime been, and many of the trees were standing still. The Spanish soldiery would sometimes come to pluck the fruit, exchanging shots and insults with the men upon our walls the while, and sometimes hardy spirits from the town would venture out beyond the walls to seize a sack of apples and return with it in triumph, for there was no green food in the town, and many were the sufferers from scurvy. More times than one had Luiz Castro braved the Spanish fire to run and fetch a jerkinful of apples for his little mistress, and so cunning had he come to be that he could wriggle through the lush, long grass that grew between the tree trunks and scarcely stir a blade of it. Then up the tree like any ape he clomb, snatched the ripening fruit from off the limbs and was away before the heavy-footed musketeers so much as knew that he had made his raid.

'Twas near the dawn upon the fourteenth day since we had sent out stink-boats down the Zinn that I was homing to my quarters on the ship after seeing all was ready on our powder-craft, when one addressed me falteringly.

"O, Mynheer Carolus," she wept, "hast seen our little Sergeant Castro—or my Lysbeth?"

I looked upon the speaker in the

lanthorn's light, and saw it was the good Vrouw van der Poort who stopped me. "The little Lysbeth or young Luiz Castro?" echoed I. "Nay, Mistress, I have seen them not. Are they not safe within your house? Meseemeth it has long been time for babes to be abed, and——"

"Nay, nay, Mynheer," she brake in tremblingly, "they have not been within the house this night. 'Twas turning dark when Sergeant Castro said that he would go and get some apples for us, and naught would do but Lysbeth must go, too. 'I've seen thee foil the Spaniards many times and oft,' she telleth him, 'and what thou doest I can do, my Luiz. I'm quick and strong and clever as a boy—oh, say that thou wilt take me with thee!'"

"He laughed at her and bade her bide within the house till his return, but she's a winsome minx, Heer Carolus, and finally she teased him till he said she might walk with him to the walls. The guardsmen at the southern postern said they let them through, but they have not come back. I know that she prevailed upon him, for he is but wax and putty in her hands, poor lad, and if the Spaniards captured them——"

"Nay, Mistress, surely they are safe," I told her, though the words rang hollow in mine ears. "I know the Castro lad, he's slippery as a bag of eels, and I make me small doubt that he has crept beneath their very noses as they slept. Belike he has not yet been able to bring Lysbeth to the gates, but be of cheer; I know that it will all be well." But while I spake my heart reproached me for the lie, for well I knew that sooner would young Luiz yield his life than keep his little lady-love exposed without the city walls.

Thereafter I enquired of the men who

watched the gate if they had heard a sudden burst of firing in the orchards, and all replied that nothing of the kind had happened, and so I took such comfort as I could from thinking that they had not died of musket-fire, whatever other fate they suffered.

But with the morning came the explanation of their truancy.

A Spanish herald with a flag of truce strode up to the walls and with him bore a parchment scroll addressed unto the Governor. The Duke Alberto had the children captive, he declared, and held them as his hostages for our surrender. One day he gave us to consider, but on the morning following he promised to impale them on sharp stakes in full view of the walls, and roast their tortured bodies where we all might see. But ere this happened, he concluded, the little Jufvrouw Lysbeth should be given to his soldiery for plaything, with the *droit du seigneur* reserved unto himself.

Now, when the news of this was bruited round there was great talk within the town, and one would ask his neighbor fearfully: "What think ye that his Excellency will do?" But the worthy Heer van der Poort was brave as any Spartan father, for when we sat in council he raised his voice and said:

"Your Excellency and worthy brother magistrates, it is proposed that I should ask that you ransom my child by giving up the town. To what avail? We know the foe who faces us, we know what Spanish mercy means. Not age nor sex nor tender youth do they respect. Once they are in the city the knife will be at every throat, the torch at every house. And so I cast the first vote of the council. My vote is nay. Let there be no surrender." And he

bowed his head and beat his breast and wept, for though he voted as a magistrate, his father's heart was anguished as he thought him of the fate which must befall his child.

THAT evening, as I busied me with preparations for the launching of our fireship, the *Vrouw van der Poort* came to me, and: "Mynheer Carolus," says she, "I am resolved."

"Resolved on what, good mistress?" I replied. And then she slipped her cloak aside and faced me in the lantern's rays, and I beheld that she was tired in her best, with jewels in her hair and a string of goodly pearls wound round her throat.

"Am I a comely woman?" she demanded.

In sooth, she was. No longer very young, she still maintained a sweet and lissome figure; her pale and firmly shapen face, with its coronal of dark, rich hair—the heritage of her Flemish ancestry—was one to make a man look twice on her, once in admiration, the second time with desire. Now there was more of passion than of charm upon her features, and her eyes seemed emerald-green and beautiful, as the sea is when you look upon it from a height and see the white sands shining up from the clear depths.

"Aye, marry, Mistress, thou art fair," quoth I, "but what——"

"You think the Spaniard would desire me?"

"Now, by Allah His great mercy, I think that any man who did not so were old, or fool, or blind, belike all three; but why do you ask me such riddles?" answered I.

"Because I purpose going to him, Mynheer Carolus. I shall take my body to him—though my soul remains be-

hind—and give it to him freely if he will but spare my child."

"'Tis madness," I began, but she would not listen to me.

"I shall go to him," she told me. "Oh, if God in His beneficence——"

"Mistress," I brake in, "this is no time to prate of God and of His mercy. God has it, I misdoubt me not, but has the Spaniard any? If thou'rt resolved to go, then I go with thee, for it may be I can talk a language that the Spaniard understands. He lusts for blood, but lusts for money more. And I am rich. The spoil of twice a hundred merchantmen fell in my hands when I overcame the pirate, and I believe that they will stay their butcher's hand when I propose a ransom."

"If I delay beyond the hour, do you look to it that the powder-boat is launched betimes," I bade Black Hassan, and then I laid aside my sword and armed me only with a dagger as Mistress van der Poort and I went through the walls and toward the Spanish camp beneath a flag of truce.

CHAPTER VI

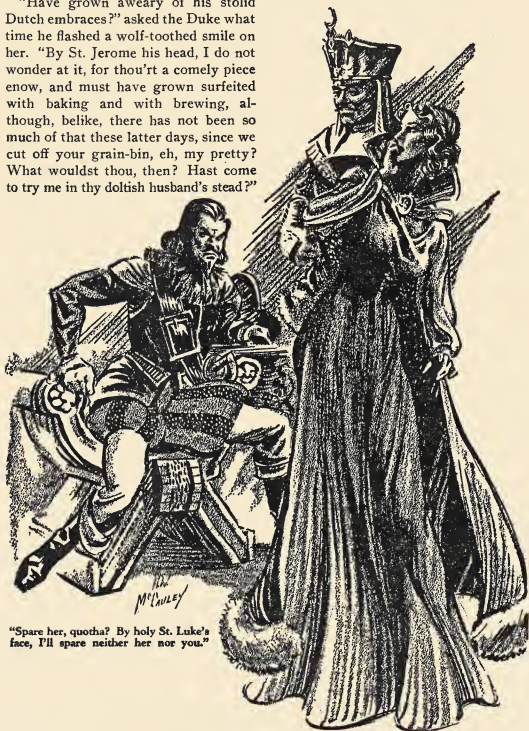
How I Bargained with the Duke

PRESENTLY we came before Duke Alberto, commander of the forces of his Catholic Majesty of Spain, a small-sized man with bright, black eyes, short, pointed beard, and a nose that bespoke his strain of Hapsburg blood, though this had filtered through the meshes of a bar sinister ere it came to him. He sat within a room of passing richness, the floors overlaid with carpets from the East, and tapestries from France and Flanders on the walls, and as his small, bright eyes shone on us in the candlelight, I thought that never had I seen a face where more of cunning and of cruelty dwelt as neighbors.

"Your Excellency," spake Vrouw van der Poort, "my husband is the burgo-master of the town of Luys, and I——"

"Have grown weary of his stolid Dutch embraces?" asked the Duke what time he flashed a wolf-toothed smile on her. "By St. Jerome his head, I do not wonder at it, for thou'rt a comely piece enow, and must have grown surfeited with baking and with brewing, although, belike, there has not been so much of that these latter days, since we cut off your grain-bin, eh, my pretty? What wouldst thou, then? Hast come to try me in thy doltish husband's stead?"

The matron's cheeks grew red and redder still as Duke Alberto spake, but, though her eyes were oerfilled with



"Spare her, quotha? By holy St. Luke's face, I'll spare neither her nor you."

tears, she held her temper in good check, and:

"Good your Excellency," she said, as though he had not interrupted with his insults, "I come to ask you to have mercy on my child. The lad ye took is little older than my babe, but he bore arms against you, and had standing as a soldier. But my daughter, little Lysbeth, she is no enemy of yours, nor could she do ye any hurt. Here stand I, Excellency, bringing you myself in trade for her. Have pity—spare my child, as you would look for mercy for a daughter of your own——"

"You weary me with so much talk," the Spaniard interrupted. "I have no daughter, Mistress, nor am I like to have one. And she is no enemy of mine, ye say? Ho, by the bones of sainted Philip, is she not? She is a heretic, and so beneath the ban of interdiction of our lord the King. Spare her, quotha? By holy St. Luke's face, I'll spare neither her nor you. What's left of ye when my men are done shall burn before the city walls in full sight of the sniveling townsmen. Yes, by St. Jude, I'll fix the pair of ye on sharpened stakes, naked as the day ye came into the world for all to gape at, and roast ye over a fire of twigs until ye're crisp enough to eat. As for the lad, the little heretic——"

"He is no heretic, but as good a Catholic as yourself," I brake in, "nor is he any rebel, either, but a mercenary soldier in the pay of the Stadts General. And since he fell into your hands according to the chance of war, he is protected by the law of nations—subject to exchange or ransom as a prisoner of war."

"**N**OW who the devil may you be, sirrah?" asked the Duke, seeming to observe me for the first time since I came into the room.

"I am Carlos de la Muerte, Captain of a band of free companions, and at present Sergeant Major in the Field in the forces of the Stadts," I answered. "Luiz Castro, your prisoner, is a member of my force, and——"

"Now, by the eyes of sainted Barbara, are ye truly that one called the Tiger?" asked the Duke. "Carlos el Tigre? May Satan roast me on a spit if this is not a pleasure, Señor Carlos! 'Twas you who threw our batteries down last winter, was it not? And you are he who formed the plan of harrying us with burning feathers, I misdoubt me not? *Por Dios*, there is no other man in all the land whose face I'd rather see tonight than yours, good Señor de la Muerte. There is a price upon your head. Had'st heard of that? No? Then it would seem your spies are not as good as ours. Yea, I myself have posted a reward of five hundred gold florins to the man who brings you down in battle or brings your head into my camp. And now, it seems, you've saved me the expense."

"Your Excellency jests," I answered him. "I am a soldier in the service of the Stadts, not a rebel or a renegade. If ye kill me in fair fight, 'tis war, but if ye slay me thus, especially when I come to ye beneath a flag of truce, 'tis perfidy. I came into your camp——"

"The more fool you to thrust your head into the lion's maw," he cut in. "How camest thou by the name of de la Muerte, good Don Carlos? 'Tis a Spanish surname, is it not? And yet ye say ye're not a rebel or a renegade?"

"They tell me ye're not even Christian. Some go so far as to declare that ye follow the false prophet, who is Antichrist. What does a man named de la Muerte do? If ye be not a rebel and a renegade, a pirate of the land and a

monstrous knave, then I be blackamoor, and all my kin and ancestry as well."

"Your Excellency is in better case to know his forebears' complexion than I be," I assured him, "but as for being renegade, I am not one. I never owed allegiance to the king of any land; as for my name——"

"No matter; 'tis probably as false as your religion," he brake in. "But that's a matter we can mend with ease, Don Carlos. We'll make a Christian of ye in all hell's despite upon the morrow, for when we roast this rebel slut beside her brat, we'll crucify ye at their side, and so the rebel swine shall have a spectacle to gape and wonder at—aye, by the tears of Mary Magdalene, to wonder at and be afraid! Look to him, guards!"

But as two sturdy varlets sprang to seize me, there came a monstrous roar as though the heart of earth were broken, and a mighty wind blew in our faces, oversetting the tall candles on the table, while beneath our feet the house began to shake and quiver like a ship at sea. "The earthquake!" screamed a hundred voices, while others cried it was the powder magazine, and others called upon the saints and on the name of God.

"San' Cristol!" shouted Duke Alberto as he seized his cloak and rushed past us. "Bid the trumpets sound. Call the men to quarters!"

"*Hayah!*" shouted I. "*El-hamdu illahi Rub el-elamin*—unto God be all the glory, the Lord of all the worlds!" Wherewith I snatched a candle-standard from the table and smote the nearest Spaniard in the face with it so he fell down, his mouth agush with blood, and lay upon the floor as helpless as a dead man. And ere his fellow could spring on me I had seized the

sword from out the fallen guardsman's hand and met him blade to blade. Steel sang gayly against steel as we exchanged our thrusts, but at the second pass I ran him through the throat and left him choking blood and prayers as I seized Mistress van der Poort's hand and led her down the passageway.

"**W**HERE be the prisoners—the little heretics?" I asked a guard, and he, mistaking me for some strange officer, pointed to a doorway further on, whereat I drove my sword-hilt in his face, knocking him unconscious to the floor, and hastened on with the good dame.

"Quick, lad, 'tis I, Carlos de la Muerte!" I called as I undid the bolts which held the door. "Is Lysbeth with ye?"

The Spaniards had put gyves upon their ankles, chaining the small maid to one corner of the room and Luiz to the other, but despite their fetters the children had crept as close together as they could, and lay upon the floor, their arms entwined about each other's shoulders, their faces pressed together.

"Up, up, in Allah's name!" I cried, and with my sword-blade prized away the ring from Luiz Castro's leg, then did the same for Lysbeth van der Poort. "They may be on us any minute, but now they wonder what the great explosion was, and give no thought to us."

As silently as though we had been shadows we crept from the house, and, sometimes wriggling on our bellies, sometimes running like four hares, we pressed on toward the city walls.

And now there rose a monstrous shouting from the camp, and we heard the tramp of horses and the clash of weapons wielded in the fray, as Nuno Cabral led my troop upon the Spanish



With a mighty shout of "Tigre! Tigre!" I ran forward to the fray.

works in a surprise attack and Heinrichs, Germans and stout Maitland's English pressed beside him to the right and left.

"Do you escort the women home," I told young Castro. "I have work to do." Then with a mighty shout of "Carlos! Tigre! Tigre!" I ran forward to the fray, and the Spanish sword I bore ran red with Spanish blood a hundred times before the morning dawned.

ALL night we harried them, for, taken by surprise, they scarce could stand against our mighty onslaught, and when their fellows from the river mouth came running out of breath to say that we had blown the barrier to bits and killed well-nigh all the garrison, and that Prince Maurice waited out to sea with a mighty fleet of warships, their retreat became a rout, and when the morning brake we found no hand to stay us as we sacked their camp.

And much rich loot we took therefrom, but chiefest and most precious to the starving burghers was the store of food we found, and those who had not tasted meat, nor even proper bread, for days were almost wild with joy when we drove the great wains of provisions through the city gates.

"Wallah, Master, by the wool of Allah's sheep, thou shouldst have seen it!" great Black Hassan told me when I met him in the town. "We sent the powder-ship against them as ye bade, with all the feathers blazing on her deck, and they made sport of her, and laughed, and laid them down upon the flooring of their mole that they should not be troubled with the smoke, and then"—his white eyes rolled within his ebon face—"and then she blew asunder,

and up went barrier and Spaniards like the ashes cast from Aetna when it vomits flame. *Wah*, we had to dodge to cover, else we had been smothered underneath the rain of arms and heads and legs which fell from out the sky!"

CHAPTER VII

How I Lost Luiz Castro

GREAT honor did I gain from these exploits, and everywhere the story how I formed the scheme to blow the Spanish barrier to bits was spread, so that I was hailed upon the streets with loud huzzahs, and: "See him, there he goes, the Fire-Master!" saith one unto his neighbor, and a mighty feast was held to do me honor, whereat everyone but me and Hassan got most villainously drunk, and his Excellency, the Governor made me public presentation of a heavy golden chain to wear as collar with the image of a tiger breathing flames hung on it, and I was everywhere acclaimed.

But now the siege was over and our work was done; so with honors thick upon us and a goodly store of booty in our hold, we made ready for the voyage to Zeadyn, for there we made our base.

And one evening as I walked the street diligently practicing the use of the tobacco pipe—for the Dutchmen liked the strange new herb from the new world, and I had heard it said it rendered those who used it safe from fever—I heard a girl's voice speaking from the shadow of the worthy burgo-master's garden.

"My dearest one," quoth she, 'how can I bear to let thee go? Alas, my heart is in thy breast, and when thou tak'st it from me I shall most surely die.' And:

"*At, ai*, my heart is breaking, too, my sweetling," saith a youth's clear voice,

"but war is war, and I a soldier. Natheless, if thou'lt wait for me, I swear by São Francisco I'll come back to thee, for when these wars be done I'll have such store of booty as shall make us both the envy of the town."

"It likes me not to hear thee swear such papist oaths," says she, and:

'Why, then, I'll swear by Luther's head or Calvin's beard, if it will make thee happier," he answers her, "but say that thou wilt wait for me, my Lysbeth."

"How can I?" she sobbed answer. "My father would not let me wait so long. Already he has spoken of his wish that I should wed, and there is Hans Leipert, the wax-chandler's fat son, to whom he fain would betroth me."

"And so, my very dearest, it must be good-bye—no! I will not have it so! Dost thou remember how we held each other fast that night when we thought death by torture was our portion on the morrow?"

"Yea, heart of mine," he answers her.

"Why, then, let us hold each other so again, and clipped in an embrace of love we'll drown ourselves together in the River Zinn. They say that suicide's a sin, but surely the good God will let us into Paradise when we tell Him that we died lest we be parted from each other."

"Now by Allah His great mercy, what means this foolish talk of suicide?" I roared as I stepped through the garden gate.

And they looked at me with a foolish, hangedog glance, and so:

"Dost love this worthless vagabond, this penniless soldier of fortune?" I asked the maid.

"Yea, Excellency," she answered with a curtsy. "I love him truly, with all my heart and soul."

"And thou, young Sergeant Castro, dost love this witting chit, this daughter of a lowing, cud-chewing Dutchman? Dost love her so that thou wouldst leave our band of free companions for her sake?"

"Excellency," he answers, "my life belongs to thee. 'Twas thou who saved me from the Spanish torture, and where thou leadeest I will follow, but—but"—he was like to blubber like a babe—"I love her more than anything on earth, and were I my own man——"

"Who says thou'rt not thine own?" I bellowed. "Did ever one of Carlos' Tiger Cubs own a master? By the beard of God, enough of this weak folly. This very night I speak Mynheer the Burgomaster for her hand——"

"But if he says thee nay, perchance, your Excellency——" the little maid puts in.

"Then by the Prophet's beard, I'll sack the town and bear thee captive oer the sea, as once they took the Trojan Helen in the days of old."

I LIKE the lad, for he is brave and honest and of manly promise," saith Mynheer van der Poort when I had asked him for his daughter's hand for Luiz, "but he's penniless, and she a mighty heiress. Why, her wedding dowry shall be a pile of minted silver equal to her body-weight. What can young Sergeant Castro have to offset that?"

"Come thou to the haymarket at the stroke of ten tomorrow," answered I, "and bring with thee thy daughter and thy worthy wife, and eke a notary. There I shall show ye what ye wot not of, Heer Burgomaster, or I'm not Carlos de la Muerte, called the Tiger and Fire-Master."

So straight I went unto my ship, and

from the store of plunder in her hold I took forth many a golden cup and chain and candlestick, and many a bag of Spanish gold, and more than one strong sack of jewels which we'd wrenched from the churchly vessels which had come into our hands.

And on the morrow, when we all were met at the haymarket, I bade young Castro seat him in the mighty scales, and then I had my man pile golden plate and coin and golden vessels from a hundred Spanish palaces and churches in the other balance, till they both swung free from off the ground.

"And what hast thou to say, to that, Mynheer?" I asked the burgomaster. "Her weight in minted silver, quotha? By Allah and by Allah, see the fortune that my Sergeant Castro brings—a hundredweight of solid gold and—give me thine cap, Mynheer," I bade, and when he, wondering, handed it to me, I drew a bag of gems from out my cloak and filled his headgear to the brim with diamonds, pearls and emeralds. "Canst match a dowry such as that?" I asked him.

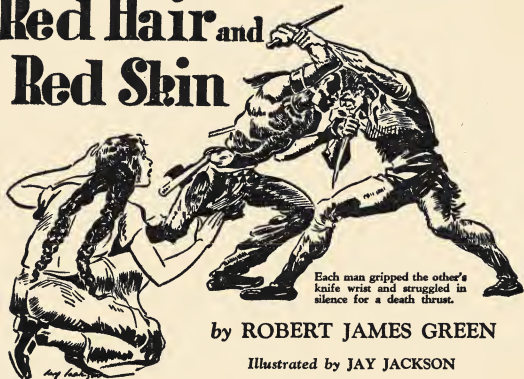
And so the notary drew the marriage contract, and solemnly they were betrothed in church.

Then to a Jewish banker of the town, an honest and a crafty man withal, I took young Luiz Castro, and gave him in his charge. "Teach him the banker's trade, and how to make his fortune ten times bigger, Master Lombard," I commanded. "He is a Portugee, and I misdoubt me not but he will better thine instructions."

And so we sailed away from Luys, and hand in hand upon the quay stood Luiz Castro, aforetime my small orderly, and his beloved Lysbeth.

Allah grant them many valiant sons and beauteous daughters.

Red Hair and Red Skin



by ROBERT JAMES GREEN

Illustrated by JAY JACKSON

FROM the clearing where she gathered a mess of greens, Hannah Martin noticed a rider in blue and buff come to a halt at the "Sign of the Horseshoe." With a bronzed hand she dug the warm moisture from her eyes and wondered who it might be could sit his horse and be served a drink by Mrs. Fletcher.

She saw Mrs. Fletcher run back into the house, only to reappear immediately.

"Han--nah!" her voice shrilled from the tavern door. "Hannah, come here!"

Hannah obediently cradled the pan against her faded cotton dress and followed the underbrush path to the house. Mrs. Fletcher stood in the tap-room, squinting at a letter.

"Hannah, Sam Ford just passed by, on leave from his cavalry troop. He brought this letter from my mother. It says she's ailing poorly. Josiah and I must go to see her."

Mr. Fletcher came from behind the till. Briefly he removed his round, florid face from a noggin of rum. "Must we go, Felicity?"

"See here, Josiah!" said Mrs. Fletcher sharply, "My mother owns a fine house and yard. If she passes on, that property should go to me. Remember, I've got brothers and sisters."

"But the tavern!" objected Josiah.

"What's to prevent Hannah from caring for it?" Her question was more a command. "I dare say our tap-room would show more profit," she added tartly. "And she does a deal of work that you should do."

"But the men as comes here—," Josiah drained his glass. "They're a hard lot, Felicity."

"She's worked here six months. Has any man so much as looked at her?"

"Ah, well!" Josiah sighed and looked toward his rum bottle.

"We'll be away most a week, Hannah," said Mrs. Fletcher. "Can you manage and make proper charges?"

"Yes, ma'am," Hannah answered, her face unusually solemn.

"We'll go tomorrow then, sun-up. You'd best churn now."

HANNAH began the monotonous churning with no elation at her coming responsibility. Each stroke of the dasher echoed the words: "Has any man so much as looked at her?"

She knew many men had seen her. Located on the highroad between New York and Philadelphia, the inn did a thriving business, despite the war.

Washington and his ragged Continentals had changed British minds about remaining in Philadelphia. Trade on the road was brisk, even with the movements of British horse and skulking Indians looking for an excuse to lift a scalp. No telling which side of the war the red devils were on; to them it made little difference.

Bearded men in hide shirts and hickory trousers carried axe and long rifle. Grizzled, furtive-eyed trappers shouldered trap-pack and musket. Gaunt farmers carted hard-won produce. Drovers trudged with their pork and beef walking before them. Shouting wagoners and blaspheming bull-men drove heavy Conestoga wagons westward.

An endless procession, they moved before her eyes going westward. Philadelphia was like a break in a beaver dam, through which poured a never-ending stream to sprinkle the Ohio wilderness. That was everyone's cry: "The Ohio!"

On a sudden impulse she stood up and looked earnestly in a cracked mirror hanging above the wash bench.

Sun and wind kept the myriad freckles in full prominence. She saw large eyes of gray-blue, like the smoky haze of an autumn day; double braids of tawny red hair, thick as the trace chains of a Conestoga freighter.

The full lips, she noticed, had become fixed in a grim line. There was little cause for an orphan girl to smile. From dawn to dark, nothing but hard work awaited her.

As she moved about the tap-room, kitchen or stable-yard, all men must see her only as a stalwart creature, full six feet tall.

If any man sensed the rugged, majestic beauty of her broad shoulders and deep bosom, they refrained from mentioning it. They first saw, she bitterly reflected, the enormous, work-roughened hands, muscular arms and long, thick legs. Now, at twenty-two, she was simply girl-of-all-work at "the Shoe;" already beginning to be spoken of as a spinster.

It was just one of many things, to be locked in her heart with other sorrows and borne without solace of a confidant. She was upon her own resources now.

Misfortune had seemed never to cease since she was fourteen. Then, Indians had burned the Martin cabin and carried her mother away, a captive. And during the winter just past, her father had succumbed to the hardships of Valley Forge, where the American army froze and starved in its rags.

And now Mrs. Fletcher had added insult to injury: "Has any man so much as looked at her?"

FOR the first time, Hannah experienced a dislike of Mrs. Fletcher; a feeling that deepened with the countless admonitions of next morning. Not

until the Fletchers' one-horse chaise dwindled to a moving black speck, did Hannah breathe an audible sigh.

When they had gone, a deep isolation settled about the frontier tavern and for a few moments Hannah felt lonely. But her sense of loneliness was soon dispelled by the vast amount of work to be done and the fact that Mrs. Fletcher had departed.

An enormous stack of flip glasses and

Then, as no travelers had stopped, she went outside and chopped a night's supply of firewood. The sharp, spring air was quiet. A cock-partridge drummed in a nearby wind-down of spruce. Flights of passenger pigeons



"Get out!" she repeated, giving the nearest Indian a shove.

pewter dishes awaited washing. Catfish which Josiah had caught that morning had to be cleaned. There was fresh pork to pickle, venison to roast, fowl to pluck, bread to be baked and bayberry candles trimmed. It was well past noon when Hannah finished the immediate tasks inside and sat down for a piece of ash-cake and bacon and a mug of small-beer.

and game birds in V-formation drifted overhead. Intermingled with natural sounds came the dull reports of distant gun fire, where Continentals and British skirmished.

After stuffing the mangers with hay against the coming of wayfarers, a commotion in the tap-room attracted Hannah's attention. Probably some impatient travelers, she thought, who

had arrived during her absence. Wiping her hands on her apron, she hurried in to ascertain their wishes.

Two half-naked, paint-smearing Indians with dried scalps dangling from their belts, reeled unsteadily about the room. Each clutched a partially emptied bottle of raw New England rum.

Another empty rum bottle lay in fragments on the floor. Evidently the savages had been there some time.

Tales of drink-crazed Indians were frequent, but in Hannah's heart burned a fierce hatred for every Indian, drunk or sober; a hate fostered by the memory of her mother.

Undaunted by possible danger to herself, she did not stop to parley. Picking up a heavy iron from the fireplace, she advanced upon the two, brandishing the iron.

"Get out, you lazy thieves!" she shouted.

Neither paid the slightest attention to her words.

"Get out!" she repeated, giving the nearest Indian a shove.

He staggered backward and crashed into the bar-wicket. His bottle dropped and broke in splinters on the oak flooring. He straightened up with a snarl and glared at Hannah with eyes that glittered like a wild animal.

"N-gauwi . . . I drink! Man-squaw fight! Yaaaah!" he growled, evidently feeling degraded at being pushed by a woman.

He snatched a war hatchet from his belt and leaped at Hannah. Before the fierce, unexpected assault she retreated, parrying as best she could with the iron. She had almost gained the kitchen doorway when she tripped and fell sprawling on her back. With a shrill yelp the savage clutched Hannah's red hair and swung his hatchet.

The blood-curdling yell scarce had left his bedaubed lips when the deafening roar of a musket crashed out in the tap-room. She felt the Indian's body suddenly jerk rigid, then drop limp and inert across her own. His hatchet clattered to the floor beside her head.

A RANK, feral odor filled her nostrils. She pushed free of the greasy body and got to her feet. The other Indian was locked in a hand-to-hand struggle with a tall man in moccasins, leather leggings, fringed deer-skin shirt and a fur cap.

Both men had drawn long knives. It was plain to Hannah that the Indian had surprised the white man when he fired, for the stranger was down on one knee.

Each man gripped the other's knife wrist and struggled in silence for a death thrust; a silence broken by grunting and labored breathing. Muscles of their necks and temples stood out like thick cords about to burst through the skin.

As they swayed and tugged, the white man attempted to rise. But the savage jerked free and with a quick twist drove his knife in a vicious thrust. With a lightning movement the stranger at the same instant jabbed upward. His knife ripped the red-skinned arm and brought a spurt of blood. The Indian's blade buried itself to the handle in the soft deerskin shirt.

Hannah had been staring as if stupefied. Now she came abruptly to life. She grabbed a short-legged stool and ran for the struggling men.

She swung the stool, brought it down in a smashing blow upon the Indian's head and shoulders. With a grunt he toppled head over heels through the open door. There he leaped hastily to

his feet and disappeared among the juniper bushes along the road.

The stranger sat on the floor. One hand held the reddened knife which he had pulled from his ribs. The other hand held his side and he made a grimace at the pain of his wound.

"Delawares," he commented. "Might've knowed there'd be more'n one of them devils." He grinned ruefully, as if ashamed at having been caught off guard.

"They're worse than devils when they're full of rum," Hannah said.

"I'm much obliged to you for saving my life," she added. "Seemed to me he cut you right sore. Did he?"

"No." He wiped his forehead. "Not bad. I could do with a drop of that rum, though, if there's any left."

"There's something better than rum." Hannah ran behind the bar. "You need some of this fine Madeira. And I don't care what Mrs. Fletcher says when she finds it gone."

WHEN she returned with a pewter mug half filled, the stranger had dragged himself to a bench. Hannah set down the mug in order to assist him, but when she had got him partially raised his hands slipped from her shoulders. His arms dropped loosely at his sides, as if suddenly he had turned into jelly.

He would have fallen had not Hannah caught and held him in a firm clasp. For a moment she gazed into his apparently lifeless aquiline features. Then cradling his long, lean body in her muscular arms as if he were but an infant, she toted him slowly and with care up the dark narrow stairs to one of the bedrooms.

As she lowered him gently to the bed, something fell from his pocket. Hannah

picked it up, startled to find it was a wad of British money.

Bewildered, she glanced with alarm from the money in her hand to the unconscious man stretched on the bed. Then, fearful of being detected, stealthily she thrust the wad of bills into his bullet pouch.

She unlaced the fringed shirt and examined the bleeding wound. For the first time that she remembered, her fingers shook slightly.

Hannah hurried to the kitchen and brought hot water in an earthen basin. After bathing the cut, she applied an herb salve of her own mixing and bandaged the patient's ribs with strips of sheeting. She forced a little Madeira between his lips and when he showed signs of returning consciousness, removed his moccasins. From her own bed she fetched a quilt and covered him.

"You'd best stay quiet and rest a spell," she admonished him when he opened his eyes. He attempted to get up, but with gentle firmness she pushed his head back on the pillow.

His blue eyes looked about the room. "You don't understand. I've got to get on."

"No!" she stated decisively. "Rest here tonight. If you feel better tomorrow, you can go on. I'll get you something to eat pretty soon."

HANNAH descended to the tap-room and dragged the dead Delaware to the wood's edge back of the garden. Beneath a white birch she dug a shallow grave, tumbled the painted body in and covered it with dirt. On the mound she piled a few branches, muttering, "Maybe to keep out other çatamounts."

She heated more water in a copper kettle and with soap made of wood

ashes and grease, scrubbed the tap-room floor and put things in order. The musket she reloaded and stood in a corner.

Hannah was cooking a broth for the stranger when a patrol of Continentals in white wool rifle-frocks and leggings and led by a brawny sergeant entered the inn. They called loudly for flip made with Newburgh brew.

"Have ye seen a stranger or so, prowlin' about?" the sergeant asked Hannah. She stood with one hand resting on an ample hip, while the other thick, bronzed forearm described circles as she stirred the flip.

"Nearly everyone as comes here is a stranger," she replied.

The sergeant leaned confidentially over the bar top. "I mean," he explained, "any suspicious-lookin' folks—those who don't seem to be goin' nowhere in 'ticular."

His voice dropped to a whisper. "We're a-lookin' for red-coat spies, an' we heard tell there's one around in summat of a disguise. Ye ain't seen a no-one who'd likely be the rogue we're after?"

He was staring hungrily at the great pitcher of flip. He could not see the sudden light that flared in Hannah's eyes, the sudden tightening of her mouth as she thought of the stranger lying upstairs with British money in his belt.

Reared in a God-fearing home of honest, loyal Americans, Hannah swallowed hard as the sergeant turned to look at her, awaiting her answer.

She shook her head, mute. For a moment she was panic-stricken at being guilty of her first lie, and a troubled hurt permeated her breast. Her conscience was eased only when she told herself that she had not actually uttered

an untruth. She had merely shaken her head.

"Well, we'll be a-ridin' 'em," growled the burly sergeant. "Come lads—flip's ready! Here's to our fox when we catch him!"

They downed the hot drink and paid their score in filthy Continental bills, then gathered their muskets and departed, wiping mouths on ragged sleeves.

Perplexed and filled with misgivings, Hannah filled a Delft bowl with hot chicken broth and poured a glass of rare old Port and carried them upstairs.

The stranger was asleep. His long, brown hair had become loosed of its queue and splashed against the coarse, white pillow like a golden spray. His windburned face with its straight nose was turned toward her as he lay breathing regularly, the firm, wide mouth slightly open.

With a strange, undefinable feeling, Hannah stood regarding him. Before her was the first man, other than her father, who had given any evidence of caring how she fared. This stranger, a British spy, had saved her life . . . had actually fought and braved death for *her*!

"The Lord forgive me!" she breathed to herself. "And I will save his, too."

A SHOUTING broke in on her meditations. Wagons with noisy teamsters were pulling into the stable-yard. The stranger awoke, looked up sharply at Hannah, then smiled.

"Yes, feelin' better, ma'am," he said. "Much better, thanks to you. I'll have to be gettin' up and movin' on now."

"No!" Hannah placed a hand awkwardly on his shoulder. A wild beating began in her heart. A fear seized her that he would insist upon going and in



Again she gathered him in her brawny arms and averting her face, carried him tenderly to her own cubby-hole room.

his weakened condition easily be caught and hanged as a spy.

"Tomorrow, maybe," she added placatingly. "Then the poultice can come off. Right now, though, I'm going to move you."

Again she gathered him in her brawny arms and averting her face, car-

ried him tenderly to her own cubby-hole room. She tucked the thick quilt about him. It brought another new, inexplicable sensation, a surge of deeply-rooted maternal instinct, and her face colored beneath the sunburn and freckles. She set the soup and wine on a chair at his bedside and fled the

room, muttering something about getting supper for the teamsters.

That night all the inn beds were occupied. Hannah dozed fitfully in an armchair in the kitchen. Whenever an owl hooted or a restive horse tugged at his halter rope, she wakened, afraid lest the wounded stranger get out of bed and be seen. After a long interval of somber, brooding thought, she decided not to tell him of the soldiers until he became well enough to travel. Then, perhaps, he might escape.

In the chill dawn of the following morning Hannah served the inn patrons their breakfast, smoking hot. They departed with a cracking of whips and a groaning of the big Conestogas. Hurrying upstairs, she found her patient awake, with a flushed face that told of fever.

"I don't feel so spry," he admitted. "But I should be gettin' on."

"Nonsense!" she retorted. "A day or two don't make such a difference." While talking she bandaged the wound afresh. "It's doing nicely. Probably won't be even a scar, hardly."

"You're a good doctor." He smiled. "I'll stay till it's healed."

On that day Hannah did as little outside work as possible and remained close to the inn. Customers straggled in and out. For the stranger upstairs, Hannah roasted a fowl and served it with honeyed rice, seed cakes and Madeira.

Mr. Fletcher, she knew, would be-moan the loss of his old wine and Mrs. Fletcher would deduct from the weekly pittance until it was paid for.

But the sick man needed the wine, and would get it, Hannah decided, if she were compelled to work the rest of her life in payment. And although there

was a vacant bed that night, she again chose to sleep in the kitchen chair.

CUSTOMERS and chores occupied her attention next morning until the sun had burned off the heavy ground mist before she could attend to the stranger.

"How does it do, ma'am?" he grinned.

Hannah smiled in return as she retied his bandages, but found herself avoiding his eyes. "You're almost well," she told him reluctantly. "You can . . . leave today, if you like."

She turned her head. "I hear someone in the tap-room . . . when they've gone, you can come down and eat."

But the arrivals did not leave. To Hannah's consternation they were Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher.

"Oh!" Hannah gasped. "I didn't expect you!"

"I must say it took you long enough to come down," said Mrs. Fletcher. "We could have stolen the tap-room. But never mind, we're home; we couldn't get to mother's because of the silly fighting."

"Bless my soul!" Josiah halted in the act of pouring a drink. "Did you sell my Port and Madeira, Hannah?"

"No, sir. I gave it to a wounded man." Hannah stared numbly at the floor.

"A wounded man? . . . A soldier? . . . Who was he?" Mrs. Fletcher fired the questions in a staccato bark.

"No—not a soldier," Hannah replied, feeling like a wretched prisoner. "He was hurt fighting Indians." She told them of the tap-room battle.

"Mercy me, Hannah, it's well we came back! No telling what might have happened if we'd stayed away a week. Did you say you *gave* him the Port?" Mrs. Fletcher eyed her suspiciously.

"Yes, ma'am."

"We don't serve free drinks to anybody." Mrs. Fletcher's tone was icy. "That will cost you ten shillings . . . five weeks' work."

"Nine shillings, Felicity," said Josiah. "It's cheaper now."

"I said 'ten shillings', Josiah Fletcher! She'll find the lesson well worth it."

"Yes, ma'am," Hannah agreed resignedly.

"We met Sam Ford," continued Mrs. Fletcher, "on the way back to his cavalry troop. He says he stopped here at midnight to water his horse and saw you a-sitting, asleep, in the kitchen on a chair and with a candle burning."

Hannah felt as if the tap-room walls were converging to crush her. She blinked a bit unsteadily.

"I was tired, I guess, and must have dropped asleep."

"Hmmp! Start your baking now," Mrs. Fletcher ordered. "Spring washing and bleaching tomorrow."

Hannah retired meekly to the kitchen. If Mrs. Fletcher would only go to the garden, even for a minute, the stranger could leave. Mr. Fletcher could be talked to.

IN a few moments she heard Mrs. Fletcher moving about overhead, inspecting the rooms. It was unlikely she would go into the cubby-room. But with the thought, Hannah's heart plummeted to her stomach, for she heard a startled shriek. Next came hurried, excited footsteps descending the stairs.

"Hannah Martin!" Mrs. Fletcher screeched from the tap-room. "Hannah! Come here this minute . . . Oh, this is terrible, outrageous, unbelievable!"

Hannah entered the tap-room, bend-

ing her red head as if facing a violent windstorm.

"Who is that man in your room?" Mrs. Fletcher demanded.

"What's the matter, Felicity?" Josiah looked up from a half-filled glass.

His wife ignored the question. Her burning gaze was directed on Hannah. "Why is that man in your room, Hannah?" she reiterated, dark eyes ablaze with points of yellow light.

In his excitement, Josiah spilled rum on his snuff-coat and smalls. "Yes, Hannah, why—," he gurgled, puffing and blowing. Mrs. Fletcher interrupted his slow train of thought.

"Speak up, Hannah—speak up!"

"He's the one hurt by the Indian, ma'am."

Choking in outraged indignation, Mrs. Fletcher's pinched features grew crimson. "And why," she trembled visibly, "just why in your room?" she demanded to know.

She crossed thin arms on her flat chest and tapped a foot, nervously, impatiently.

"It was warmer there, ma'am . . . over the kitchen."

"Outrageous!" Mrs. Fletcher shrielled. "We're respectable folks, Hannah. You can't work here any longer. The very idea! What would your poor father think? What will people say?"

Hannah took a very deep breath, like a swimmer going under water. "He's—he's promised to marry me!" she blurted, desperate under the relentless questioning. Then realizing the enormity of her statement, a dull scarlet suffused her face until the color merged into the red hair.

"Marry you! Of all things! I don't believe it . . . no more than Josiah would have kept his promise if my two brothers had not been so handy."

"And I wouldn't have blamed him none!" A firm, level voice came from the stairs door.

Mrs. Fletcher whirled about. Beyond her, Hannah saw the stranger step forth, his face grim. Mrs. Fletcher sucked in her breath and retreated a step.

"I heard everything," he went on. "I couldn't help it." He took Hannah's hand in his. "Hannah told you right . . . we aim to marry as soon as we get to a preacher."

Hannah stared at him, dumb with amazement. She felt her eyes full with tears that overflowed and ran down her cheeks. Her heart seemed about to burst.

"Hmmp!" Mrs. Fletcher sniffed disdainfully.

"Well, 'pon my soul!" exclaimed Josiah. "That calls for a toast to bride and groom." He set out glasses. "Step over, folks."

The stranger stepped beside her to the bar to accept Josiah's proposal. He offered his arm, just like she had seen gentlemen do. She took it, wanting to laugh and cry at the same time. A strange exhilaration made her light-headed. A new life had opened, a wide pleasant road down which she and the stranger would walk to eternity.

But the dream road suddenly became the everyday, muddy stage-coach road. She stared, round-eyed, in frightened recollection. A group of men approached. They were dressed in soiled white rifle-frocks and at their head strode a burly sergeant.

HANNAH'S smile changed to stark terror. Instinctively she pulled the stranger toward the stairs.

"Mrs. Fletcher," her voice was hurried and frightened, "my man's too hurt

to travel. Let him rest in my room for tonight. I'll sit up . . . please!"

"No!" Mrs. Fletcher was emphatic. "Nor will I drink even a thimble of toast. Hannah, you're a shameless baggage!"

The soldier's voices were growing louder. Terror-stricken, she faced the stranger. Discarding all propriety, she moved closely against him and spoke in his ear.

"Go to the kitchen . . . or stable . . . get out of sight!" she implored in a hoarse whisper. "It's Washington's men!"

There was no time for more words. But apparently the stranger did not yet understand. A man mounted the front steps, each heavy footfall echoing like a death-knell. The big, red-faced sergeant entered.

"An even dozen of flip!" he bawled. "No—make it thirteen," he corrected. "We cotched a red-coated fox . . . without his coat. We'll show him a touch o' true Yankee hospitality afore he does a sunrise jig."

"A fox?" repeated Josiah blankly.

"A spy," said the sergeant, rubbing his hands together. He leaned his long-barreled musket against the bar, then noticed the stranger.

"Blood and beeswax!" he thundered. "If'n it ain't Dick Johnston!" Beaming, he held out a grimy paw. The stranger shook it vigorously.

"S'truth! Cotched him with papers," he boasted. "If'n I do say it, Mr. Johnston, ye couldn't done a neater piece o' work yourself, even if ye do be the greatest scout in these thirteen colonies. And look ye, Mr. Johnston," he added confidentially, "mebby ye could drop a good word for me to Gin'ral Washington. There's nobody he trusts quicker'n you."

The stranger addressed as Dick Johnston laid a hand on the sergeant's shoulder. "Right glad to, Sergeant Bixby. I expect to be reportin' to the General before the week's over." With a parting nod of assurance to the gratified sergeant, he turned to Hannah.

She had been listening to the conversation as in a daze, too overcome by its revelation to grasp at once the full force of the relief it brought her.

She felt her shoulders sagging as if under a heavy load. The trembling of her hands would not be stilled even when clasped against her bosom. Surely, years had passed during her battle against the threatened deluge of ruin and despair. No labor had ever left

her with such fatigue, such utter exhaustion. Only with a superhuman effort did she hold herself from slumping to the floor.

"Pack your belongings, Hannah," he said. "The stagecoach will soon be along. I'm goin' outside a minute."

As if under a spell, Hannah moved to obey. For the moment she was conscious only of the fact that her man had spoken. His word now was her law.

But as she stepped toward the stairs the weight seemed lifted from her shoulders. A reawakened vigor came into her step. Tears were coming but she would be upstairs, out of sight. And nothing, now, could stop the wide mouth from smiling.



The Pipe as Life Saver

When the average man says that his pipe is a "life saver," he is making use of a figure of speech. But, had any man in the expedition of Marquette and Joliet, which explored the Mississippi River in 1673, used the same term, he would have been speaking literal truth.

The expedition left Canada on May 13, 1673. As it journeyed down the Illinois to the Mississippi, it came upon a village of the Illinois Indians. The red men were friendly and presented the explorers with a Calumet or Peace Pipe. At the presentation, it was explained that this Calumet was the greatest of all gifts within the Indians' power to bestow. The travelers were told that the Peace Pipe received the greatest honor among the Indians. It was the arbiter of life and death, peace and war. One bearing it could go with confidence into the midst of enemies, who in the heat of combat would throw down their

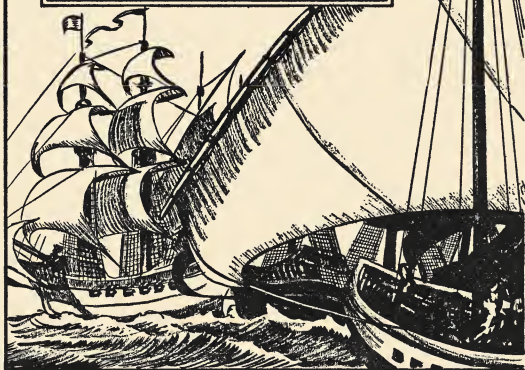
weapons when it was shown to them.

The Frenchmen took these claims of the power of the Calumet with a large grain of salt. However, they accepted it gravely and went their way. One may imagine their surprise and gratification when upon the occasion of an attack by hostile tribesmen the exhibition of the Calumet not only stopped the attack, but even opened the doors of hospitality to them. Thereafter, the pipe was their most prized possession and was prominently displayed whenever the party encountered red men.

So potent was the Calumet that the expedition made the entire journey without suffering a single casualty from attack by Indians. On the contrary, though they were for the most part traveling through hostile territory, they were everywhere received as honored guests and treated like royalty.

—By Edward F. Leyh III.

Much Lost More Won



by H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by MAURICE ARCHBOLD, Jr.

TEMPLETON, dark and impetuous and fiery, listened with impatience as we talked of the changing history of the world, the murderous warfare east and west, the wholesale slaughter and rapine from China to Spain.

"It's nothing new," he broke out suddenly. "Anyhow, we don't know

what's happening anywhere. Nobody knows. It'll come out maybe a hundred years from now—how some chap turned the course of history by a handshake."

"Who?" asked somebody. Templeton shrugged.

"Anyone; you or I. That's the way



history is made. The captains and the kings rant before the footlights. Away upstage, some unknown person pulls the strings, perhaps without his own knowledge. It's happened many times, particularly in the east, in the south seas, in the orient."

"You have a case in mind?" I demanded rather coldly.

"I have," said he. "I got hold of it in the Philippines last year, looked it up in the Arab records—the Moro

tribes, you know, are more than half Arab. I could tell you how a *nakoda*, and Arab ship-captain, played hero to destiny three hundred years ago, and got no credit."

We called for drinks and cigars. Templeton, who has spent most of his life out in the islands, has no end of yarns that are not in the history books. Nothing loath, he waved his cigar, looked into the weave of smoke, and worked his wizardry.

“IT WAS just about three centuries ago, when the Dutch and Portuguese and Spanish and English were fighting tooth and nail for the spice trade and the Indies. The Portuguese held Malacca, but were losing out; a ten-year siege by the Dutch was drawing to its end. The Spaniards held Manila, but not strongly. Everything was in flux, a changing world.

“For a thousand years the Arabs like the Parthians before them, had been the seamen and navigators of these eastern seas. Theirs was all the knowledge of the monsoons, which blew the fleets eastward for half the year, westward the other half; the island trade, the coral reefs, the spice groves, the pirate lairs—all were known to the Arabs then, before Europeans ever heard of them.

“In those seas the word *nakoda* is still used to express the master of his own keel, the captain and ship-owner. It was a proud name in the ancient days. I wish I could make you see Nureddin the Nakoda as I can see him in my mind’s eye! I’ve known more than one man of his type, proud and fierce and honorable to a fault, but never one who had the tremendous physical power and the keen brain, the will to victory, of Nureddin, Light of the Faith...”

He was silent for a moment. Then, to make us see his man, he quoted the old Arab proverb and explained its meaning: “If you meet a cobra and a Hazrami in the road, slay the Hazrami!”

A HAZRAMI, a man of Hadramaut, the old Arabian seaport, was the most dangerous thing afloat or ashore. Safer a cobra in the way, and less deadly, than a Hazrami of the

old breed. Such was Nureddin, such were all his crew in the big dhow that had come to the Philippines from far-away Hadramaut.

That morning he had sailed out of Manila bound for Sulu and the Moro ports, when the *Swann* and her consort overhauled him. They plumped a few shot at him and were about to let him have full measure, when the two Portuguese ships came out of Manila Bay and hove up for the Dutchmen. Then Nureddin stood on the rail of his ship and watched, a bronze figure like the Perseus of Cellini. He sensed what was coming, though the Dutchmen did not. He had the gift of smelling blood before it was spilled.

“By Allah,” said he to his men, all older men than he, “wait and see how these Christians fight!”

So he waited. The two Portuguese bore down; he saw the *Swann* signal them and hail, saw the Portuguese suddenly luff and pour full broadsides into the two smaller craft. Then they laid aboard and grappled, ship for ship; and there was fighting that day off the Luzon shores, from ten of the morning until sunset. When Nureddin and his men made the sunset prayer, they saw the Portuguese admiral go down to death with all his crew, while the *Swann* still floated, though she was afire; and the other two ships, still grappled, were still fighting savagely. And Nureddin, laughing, headed away for the Moro ports.

“There are the ones who can fight!” said he. “Let’s make friends with these Hollanders, if we meet any.”

So he bore on south, and at Sulu spoke with an English ship, who told him that two Flemings—so they called the Dutchmen then—were lying off the

Boedor river; and he went on there to fulfill the will of Allah.

That was a large and a wide river, coming down to the sea through marshes and rice-paddies in half a dozen mouths, with Boedor two miles up the stream. In those days it was a rich place, famous for pearls, and the sultan could summon full fifty fighting praus if need were. In fact, he had already summoned them, to the astonishment of Nureddin and his Arabs. The river and harbor were crowded with ships.

The landing was a ceremonious affair, Nureddin the Nakoda and twelve picked men going with gifts to be received by the sultan. They were dressed in their finest; he wore a light steel cap, a steel mesh shirt, his gold-hilted scimitar and a scarlet cloak over all. Tall, young, with the face of an eagle and the bearing of a conqueror, he was hailed with admiring shouts by the massed Moro warriors, as he led his men up to the palace.

Here was a tremendous jam, for the dattos and warriors of the neighboring islands were here, the captains of the praus, the council, and a score of Dutchmen. Nureddin noted the grizzled, bearded faces, the half-armor, the sturdy bearing of these last, and saluted them joyously, in friendly fashion. He exchanged greeting and salutations with the old sultan, Ali, then stood in talk.

Everyone else there was seated, even the Dutchmen; it was the fashion among the Malays and Moros and other island peoples to squat, in token of respect to the sultan. This the men of Hadramaut did only when regarded as equals. Nureddin took note that the Dutchmen had an interpreter, an Achinese. They spoke no Arabic. He,

however, had learned their tongue from a Dutch renegade in Hadramaut. When he found that the sultan had gathered this array for a raid against the Mindanao shores, a thin smile drifted across his high-boned features.

"It were better, Beloved of Allah," he said to the old sultan, "to uplift the standard of a *juramentado*, a holy war against the infidel in Manila!"

"Has Allah added your brains?" spat out the sultan. Nureddin laughed.

"Not yet, Sultan Ali! I have news, important news, for your ear alone. Gather your council and give me private audience, I pray you. First let me speak with these infidel Hollanders, or with their captain, and I'll guarantee you the aid of their guns and ships."

Sultan Ali chewed his betel paste and eyed the young eagle who dared advise him. Well he knew the worth of the men of Hadramaut, and Nureddin the Nakoda had won a name for himself even among the islands, where every man was a warrior to the death. Into his fierce, shrewd eyes came a glimmer of admiration and resolve.

"Wait in the inner court. I will come. First I'll send the captain of these infidels to speak with you. Also his interpreter."

"No need of that; I speak his tongue," said Nureddin.

A CHAMBERLAIN took him to the inner courtyard, a pleasant spot with a fountain, and left him. There, as he waited, a lattice at a window was pushed aside, and he looked up to meet the eyes of a girl. He stood stock-still; so did his heart. Their eyes met and held. She was of such striking beauty that Nureddin was stupefied. Yet he knew how often mere beauty was deceptive, in the orient. He noticed

that she wore in her hair an ornament of pearls, shaped like a scimitar; then she smiled, made him a slight gesture, and was gone from sight.

Nureddin turned, to meet the Dutch captain, Jans Doort, a massive, heavy-jawed man. He saluted gaily and spoke in very fair Dutch.

"Greetings, mynheer. Do you know a ship of your nation called the *Swann*?"

"Aye!" replied Doort in astonishment. "I know her well. We took her from the English. She was to meet us here."

"She will not, for she was afire when I saw her last, after fighting a Portuguese all day long," said Nureddin.

He went on to tell what he had seen off Manila, while Jans Doort swore many a grim oath at hearing the tale. Then he went on, craftily, to tell more.

"You may ask why no other ships came out from Manila to help those Portuguese in the fight? Because no others are there. The two stationed there were destroyed in the hurricane of last month. Other ships have not come yet, except those two Portuguese craft. Also, insurrections have broken out, and the pestilence is in Manila; there is great sickness. Many of the garrison were lost with the harbor ships in the hurricane."

"What of it?" asked Jans Doort, pulling at his beard.

"A fleet is expected from Spain, but cannot arrive for another month," said Nureddin. "Because of the insurrectos, the castle and land forts must be manned. Thus, the harbor forts are empty. There are not enough soldiers for both. Further, I know the harbor, the entrances, the depths, every foot of the place."

A startled gleam lit up the Dutchman's eye.

"You've just come from there, I hear."

Nureddin laughed a little.

"I might go back there. Why not? We could do it in three days, with a fair wind. I have eight guns aboard my dhow, and sixty men who can fight them. You have two ships and more guns, and your men can fight. Here is Sultan Ali, with some fifty praus and three or four thousand Moro warriors—who can fight! Why waste time on Sulu, where the loot is small, when Manila and an empire is waiting?"

"Ha!" exclaimed Jans Doort, and grunted in his beard. His face lit up. "You're Nureddin the Nakoda, eh? Yes. I heard of you at Achin. Manila—ha! Thunder and lightning! It could be done. Manila seized for Holland, aye! Will the sultan do it?"

"Will you do it?" Nureddin looked him in the eyes.

"I'll consult my officers."

"Then consult them. Here comes the sultan. I'll talk with him and his council; ten to one, he'll do it. He hates the Spaniards. Come back and talk with him in the morning. By that time, you'll find him all afire for the venture—if you are."

Well Nureddin knew that Sultan Ali and the wrinkled old men of the council, who looked like monkeys in their scarlet jackets, would itch for the sword-hilt when they heard how helpless Manila was; and would not wait for morning to blaze for a holy war against the infidel and the loot of the Spanish town.

JANS DOORT stalked out, assembled his junior captain and his officers aboard his ship, and imparted

the news to them. They lit long pipes and broached a keg of beer, they looked at one another, they heard the news of the *Swann*, and the junior captain spoke up.

"The *Swann* and her consort much damaged or lost, eh? That's bad news. Manila town ready to drop like a ripe plum, eh? That's good news. Treasure ready for the loading."

A little man with flaming eyes spoke with sudden sharpness.

"Is that all ye see in it? Look, Jans Doort! Here's the offer in our hand—not of a little loot alone, though God knows we'll not refuse that, but something greater. The whole course of history in these seas, for ever! Manila can't be taken. It's impregnable, ordinarily. But, if this news be true, we can take it for Holland!"

"That," said Jans Doort mildly, "had occurred to me. Look, gentlemen! We have two other ships loading at Achin; we can send word to them to come to Manila. We must act now or never. No delay is possible. Decision is here and now. It means the winning of Manila, and more than that, a secure base from which we can't be dislodged. All those islands will be ours; the island trade, the China trade, the spice trade—at one stroke, everything falls to our hand. Spain will be swept off these seas."

"Right," said another. "Who holds Manila, holds Luzon; who holds Luzon, has wealth of every kind, and the key to empire. I vote we agree—if this Arab trader can be trusted to fight."

"Fight?" Jans Doort smiled and sent a smoke-cloud at the cabin ceiling. "You don't know him. But he promises he can pilot us, once in the harbor."

"There's the rub," said the other

captain, in doubt. "Our ships mean life to us all. None of us know Manila harbor; the Spanish charts are secret. No one knows it. These Moros, with their light craft, are ignorant of depths. If we ran aground in that harbor, God help us all! Without a pilot, I'd say no. I'm not sure of this Arab."

"I think he's the right man for us," said Jans Doort. "Suppose we take that for granted, eh? On the assumption that he'll pilot us, let's put it to the vote—do we see Sultan Ali and make a bid for empire?"

One by one, they voted; there was no dissenting voice. Fired by this chance at destiny, they were ready to gamble lives and fortunes and future, and said so.

NUREDDIN, meantime, laid his information before Sultan Ali and the council of old dattos, left them to chew over the thought of a holy war and loot beyond all calculation, and took his swaggering way out of the palace.

As he passed through the gates and headed for town, an old crone came whining up to him, asking alms in Allah's name. He gave her a coin, and she cackled a laugh.

"Thanks, Nureddin the Nakodal! Now go to the bazar of the yellow infidel, and ask to see the pearls in his rear room."

"Eh?" Nureddin gave her a quick glance. "Why should I? Pearls?"

"Shaped like a scimitar, lord," was the answer, and the old hag departed.

Pearls in dark hair, a scimitar of pearls—ah! His heart leaped. He was not unused to such palace intrigues. His girl of the palace would be there! Then, with contempt, he spat and growled an oath. A mere pretty toy,

no doubt; a dumb doll with a lovely face!

A palace girl seeking a light o' love—Allah forbid! His hot and tempestuous Arab heart leaped again, and recoiled. In that girl's face he had divined great things, wonderful things; and it hurt to find her so cheap. Or was he mistaken?

He fell in talk with a captain of the palace guards, and in jest mentioned a dream he had had two nights ago, a dream of a woman wearing in her hair an ornament of pearls shaped like a scimitar. The captain stared and rolled his eyes.

"Allah upon you, Hazrami! That is a true dream. The princess Fatima, youngest daughter of the sultan, upon whom be peace, wears such an ornament in her hair!"

Nureddin laughed lightly. "Of a truth? And she is fat and ugly, no doubt?"

"As Allah liveth, Hazrami, she is a very gazelle for beauty, and the wisdom of the ages is in her brain! In three weeks she is to marry the datto of Jolo—he is here now, and has brought ten praus to the assembly."

Carelessly, Nureddin closed the talk and sauntered away, but now he went straight to the town and the bazars. There were a few Chinese traders in the islands, and one of these had a bazar in the town here, a large and prosperous place.

When he had bought a thing or two, Nureddin beckoned the yellow man apart and said he had come to see the pearls in the rear room. He was taken through a narrow passage, a curtain lifted and fell, and he was alone in a room with the girl of the palace. She was veiled, now, and cloaked from head to heels, but he could glimpse her face through the thin veil.

"Greetings, Nureddin, and peace," she said softly.

"And to you, peace," he rejoined. Then she gave him a shock.

"So you came, drawn by a pretty face, in search of intrigue?"

"No, by Allah!" he said stoutly. "I came to see if so lovely a face could have so cheap a heart."

"Ah!" Her voice leaped at him, thrilled him, burst into a rippling laugh. "Well said! You're the man I thought you were, at first sight. I've no time now to talk or to explain. Will you do me a service, Nureddin?"

"I may and I may not," said he. "Lightly promised, lightly forgotten; that's not my way. When I give my word, I keep it. Is the service to be done a sultan's daughter, the promised bride of a chieftain—or to a woman named Fatima?"

SHE caught her breath. "So you know me! Well, why not? I want a boat, six rowers, and your sword to guard me, an hour past the prayer of darkness tonight. We must row eight miles up the river and land, wait an hour, and return."

"Is that all?" asked Nureddin. She laughed again.

"All? It may mean all—life and death and eternity. My errand at that village up-river is to free my brother, who has been condemned to death by my father."

Nureddin frowned. "A father condemn his own son to death?"

"The sultan, my father, is a harsh man," she said bitterly. "He sells me into a loveless marriage with the datto of Jolo; he condemned my brother, who dared to speak the truth. Now will you help me or not?"

Nureddin looked at her for a long, long moment. Once again his heart

leaped, this time wildly, exultantly; and his heart shone in his eyes. She was a woman like a sword, true and keen and great-hearted. Her beauty was no lie. There was a flame in her; it spoke by her tongue, in her eyes, through her words.

"You may well hesitate," she said a trifle scornfully. "If my absence is dis-



"Pearls?" "Shaped like a scimitar, lord," was the answer, and the old hag departed.

covered, if I'm betrayed, it means death and torture for us both."

"I think we shall each be in good company." A smile curved his lips, lit up his eagle-face, lightened his eyes. "Death together, life together—there's a gamble worth the winning, by Allah! Look, Fatima. In a moment, all life is changed; I give you my promise, my heart, myself. You're the woman I've sought and have never found till now. Agreed! Tell me where to find you an hour after the prayer of darkness."

She told him, drew aside her veil, put out her hand with a word of thanks; he pressed her fingers to his lips and she was gone, with her ringing laugh that was like the little silver bells under the Borodor temple eaves.

IN THE sunset, over their bowl of food, Nureddin talked with his mate, a shrewd old Arab. The other men

were all ashore, seeking women in the vast camp of warriors that lined the curving beach.

"Have the men aboard an hour after midnight," said Nureddin. "Warp out the dhow silently and carefully with the current. Let her drop downstream, just below the town."

"It is an order," said the mate obediently.

With darkness, Nureddin had his boat, and six of his best men. He knew now that Fatima's warning had not been idle, for the camp was full of talk about the prince Khalid and his fate—condemned to death upriver, in another two days. A fine fellow, said all of them, but Khalid had been a fool to brave the old sultan, to try and save the life of a man, to speak the truth about injustice and tyranny. The more Nureddin heard, the higher sang his heart; and as they waited, he told his six men about it, keeping back nothing.

They were no ordinary men, but were full mailed, keen, hard warriors and seamen, veterans of seas and battle, each of them worth a score of ordinary men.

"Why, here is a brave errand!" said one, laughing. "Love and rescue, brave hearts together—by Allah and Allah, I'm glad to be alive this night!"

The others said likewise, and Nureddin felt a swelling in his throat that such men should be his comrades and should serve him.

She came, alone, wrapped in a dark mantle. A word, an excited breath, and she was in the stern beside Nureddin, and the six rowers pushed off.

"Who knows the river?" asked one of the men.

"I do!" said she. "And I sit beside your captain. Row, Hazrami!"

They laughed to hear the word on her lips, for she had a pretty accent.

Nureddin, moving the tiller, struck his elbow against her breast, and felt the hard touch of mail. She laughed softly, took his hand, and showed him that she wore a coat of steel mesh like his own, and was girded with a curved sword as well.

"I'll not be empty-handed in peace or war," said she, but he did not know the meaning of those words yet awhile.

The eight miles upstream to the village below the rapids were not quickly passed. The current was swift, wide as the river was, and other boats had to be avoided. Nureddin talked with the girl beside him, learned much of her, imparted much of himself; gradually they grew acquainted with likes and dislikes and ambitions and past histories. And the more he learned of her, the farther he saw into her heart and brain, the wilder sang his blood.

"Your great plan goes through," she said suddenly. "I heard tonight that my father and the council have decided to follow your advice, to follow you, join with the infidels and go to Manila. It will be settled in the morning. Are you glad?"

"Yes," he said honestly. "Conquest, glory, achievement—why not be glad? But I'll not leave you. How are you going to free your brother? What are your plans?"

"A faithful servant does the work; but I must get him away," she said. "Plans? I have none. If I get back to the palace unseen, well and good. If not—well, at least I've found a man worth calling comrade!"

"We'll talk about that later," said Nureddin.

She pointed the place; they drew in at a village beach amid fishing craft drawn up on the shore. All was dark under the stars, and silent, until village



He pressed her fingers to his lips and she was gone, with her ringing laugh like little silver bells.

dogs began barking. Fatima rose as the boat backed in, stepped out and waded ashore.

"Wait," she said. "It may take a while. Will you wait?"

"Shall I go with you?" asked Nureddin.

"Safer not. You don't know the jungle paths. Will you wait?"

"We'll wait," said he, and she was gone.

THEY pushed out a little way, anchored, and waited. Nureddin talked with the six men, and the news about Manila brought fierce exultation to them and to him. He talked of his great schemes—place Manila in Dutch hands, and wax great! The Dutch were well liked in all the islands, whereas the Spaniards were hated. All the Moro trade would come to Manila, the trade of Sumatra and Borneo and beyond; wealth and power would come, alliance between the Dutch and Arab traders—why, the thing became enormous in scope and dream!

They waited a long time, an hour and another hour. The men dozed, their steel shirts and caps laid aside.

Suddenly Nureddin started. Off in the jungle, a drum was sounding. It was taken up elsewhere; a message, obviously, of uneven throbbing beats. It traveled on. Another and another took up the sound, fading away into the distance. A vague sense of evil oppressed Nureddin as he listened.

The men stirred, wakened, cursed the drums in the night. The village dogs began to bark once more, furiously. Nureddin hove up the anchor and sent the boat in at the mudflat shore, and presently heard her voice.

"All well, Nureddin! But get away fast. They're after us."

Two figures loomed, came scrambling into the boat. The oars dipped. They were out on the starlit water, whirling away with the current; behind, all was silence and darkness. No alarm, no shouts. A laugh broke from Nureddin.

"Allah be praised! I thought you said they were after you?"

"You heard the drums? They've sent word on ahead." She crowded close to him. Khalid spoke, courteously, quietly, voicing his thanks; a slim, dark figure of restraint.

The moon was up now, well past the full, rising at midnight, striking a silvern radiance down the river road. With current and oars, the boat sped fast. Presently Fatima touched Nureddin's arm, her voice soft with regret.

"I'm sorry. It's another mile to the narrows; they'll stop us there. That's where we'll find the first boom—a defence against pirate raids, that can be swung across the river. Another farther down. You'll have to let us slip ashore and take our chances in the jungle. For your sake, dear Nureddin, I'm sorry."

He grunted scornfully. A laugh broke from the men.

"By Allah, we'll take you through safely!" said he. "How can they know about us?"

"The drums tell everything. That I'm here, with you. The drums from the coast make answer. There will be boats on the river, coming up. To get through is impossible."

"Wait and see," answered Nureddin. "We've met booms before now."

They swept on. Here the river made a wide bend and then narrowed for a space. As they came around the bend, the flare of torches appeared ahead. Nureddin snapped out an order. Two of his men laid in their oars, produced bow-cases and quivers, strung their

bows, and moved aft, so that the boat was out of trim, her bows high. She was a stout but light craft, long and narrow, well suited for work about reefs or rivers.

"Careful!" exclaimed Khalid suddenly. "They will have rafts to fight off any attack on the boom! If you have an extra bow, give me one."

The stroke-oar chuckled and passed him bow and quiver, without losing a stroke. Nureddin held the boat in mid-stream, heading for the torches. These burned on two bamboo rafts, crowded with men, moored along the center of the boom. This boom, of huge bamboos, was half awash.

A storm of voices broke out at the boat as she drew near. Conches, drums, brazen gongs sounded death. Orders were shouted. Nureddin, making no answer, headed between the two rafts. When he drew near, the air suddenly sang with shafts. An arrow slapped into the gunnel, another thudded on his steel shirt.

"Loose!" he said, and the bowstrings twanged.

The two men, standing, shot with terrible rapidity, their shafts piercing the crowded masses aboard each raft. Shouts became shrieks. The bow of Khalid joined in. Those powerful bows sent their arrows through and through the unprotected warriors. Wild confusion ensued as dead and dying plunged down. In the midst, Nureddin called sharp warning, and the two men dropped their weapons as the bow of the boat slid up on the bamboo boom. Under the weight, the boom sank.

The two darted forward, the oars dipped and pulled, the boat slid up and over the boom and was across. A few arrows sped after her. With all six oars

at work again, she fled away downstream in the cold moonlight.

"Hurt?" queried Nureddin. "Not even a wound? Good. There'll be worse ahead. Where's the second boom, Fatima?"

"A mile above the town," she replied. "But it's not like this one. It's made of great logs lashed together, that will hold back a war prau. And there's a huge fighting platform, an enormous raft. The warriors will be men from below, also, not villagers."

"So much the more honor in fighting through them," and Nureddin laughed a little. "Mahmud and Abdallah! When I give the word, bend every effort to cutting the lashings. Use your own brains—we don't know what'll turn up. If it comes to swordwork, the others join me and we'll get you time to do the cutting."

THE drums were speaking again, from behind, from ahead; a more rapid beat now, excited tongues speeding the word downstream. The moonlight hung clear and beautiful on the water, and Nureddin caught a sudden exclamation from Khalid, as he leaned toward his sister.

"What's that? Fatima! What's that sword?"

She laughed, and bared the blade she wore. A huge kris, shaped like a flame, the hilt heavy with gold and gems.

"Our father's kris," she said. "The sword of authority, the sacred kris of the sultan! Take it, Khalid; I stole it for you. Take it and use it."

Nureddin eyed the thing curiously. The scabbard was draped with pearls, the flame-bladed weapon richly dight with gems that flashed in the moonlight.

"A treasure indeed," said Khalid, "but

if we win through, it becomes a gift for our friend here, Nureddin the Nakoda!"

"Keep it," said Nureddin, understanding now the words of the girl. "I have gems enough, and a blade that suits my hand better, of Toledo steel. If I seek reward, it is not from you but from another."

Fatima looked at him, her face flashing with laughter and excitement.

"If you seek rewards from me, Nureddin, look well that I share in them fully!"

"You shall do that," he said, and put his hand under her chin and kissed her on the lips, and her lips responded. From the men at the oars broke a grunt of fierce delight. Thus, silently yet with a perfect understanding of words unuttered, was their troth plighted beneath the moon.

The boat swept on at speed, and Fatima sketched the situation ahead. The great boom was meant to close the river to traffic, and did so upon any alarm. There was no evasion, for the channel was narrowed by rocks on either side. Scarcely had she finished speaking, when a glow of light showed ahead, and they were in a straight course that led down to the boom, where hundreds of torches flashed. A groan escaped Khalid.

"No use, Nureddin! Men are there by the hundred."

"Only so many can reach the boat and us," said Nureddin. "Ha! Look there!"

A small boat was hailing them. Fatima answered in the local dialect, and turned.

"Nureddin! They know you're here, and that I'm here. They say to come in peace to the raft and talk. The datto of Jolo is there, and one of my father's chief captains."

"Good," said Nureddin. "Mahmud! You and Abdallah work while we talk."



The little boat tore on back ahead of them. They held on, and Nureddin drank in what awaited them, his brain alert to seize every chance; there was none.

In the torchlight, the boom was visible, high and great. In mid-current was a huge raft or platform, solid as the earth itself; he reckoned swiftly, and found there must be a hundred men or more on the raft alone, for it was all aglitter with weapons and armor in the torchlight. On the downstream side of the raft, which blocked further passage, was a crowd of boats from the town below, with more men.

"Allah is great!" said one of the rowers, glancing over his shoulder. "The river crocodiles will be full fed this night. They trap us into a peace-talk."

Nureddin said nothing, but steered for the right side of the platform, where

a space was being cleared in the lurid torchlight. Once landed there, he was lost, it seemed. He held on; a dead silence had fallen upon all those men. Fifty feet from the platform, he called aloud.

"In the name of Allah! Do ye guarantee peace?"

"We do not," replied a short, squat, powerful figure in gay sarong and coat. "But we offer you peace and free passage, if that be your choice after hearing our words."

"Then the choice shall be mine," said Nureddin, and signed his oarsmen on.

"That is the datto of Jolo," breathed the girl beside him. "And at his elbow is Mansur, chief of my father's captains. If you land there, you must consent to what they say or be killed quickly."

"So they think," Nureddin said. "Mahmud! Throw your cloak over Abdallah, so he may cut at the lashings unseen, while we talk."

THE oars were put in. The boat drifted down upon the boom and the platform, and came to rest where two of the huge tree-trunks were lashed together. Murmurs went up at sight of Fatima, rising with Nureddin to land. He signed Khalid and the others back, and went first, with the girl following. In his hand was his naked scimitar, a keen curved blade made long since in Toledo. Fatima was slim in her mail-shirt, lovely to see.

The datto of Jolo, for whom a stool had been placed, was a squat chieftain, dark with negroid blood, and held between his two hands, as he sat, a heavy-bladed war axe. He sat leaning upon it, his eyes going to Fatima, slender-breasted, her hair flowing, in her hand the common kris she had taken from

her brother in exchange for the glorious weapon.

"Well?" Nureddin halted in front of the datto, smiled a little, leaned lightly on his long thin blade. "Why is our passage stopped?"

"You know well," snapped the chieftain. "As Allah liveth, I am here to act, not to talk! You are a fool. Hand over this woman and her brother, and you go free, for we respect you, Nureddin the Nakoda. Otherwise you shall be slain quickly."

"Wait, wait!" exclaimed a voice. Through the close-packed throng came shoving a burly figure. It was Jans Doort, in half-armor, steel cap in hand. "I want a word with you, Nureddin!"

"Have it," said Nureddin quietly. He had put on his steel cap, was very composed, but his hawk-face was alight with repressed eagerness. Behind him, covered by the mantle, he knew that Abdallah was at work on those lashings.

"You've jeopardized everything," exclaimed the Dutchman angrily. "We've decided to accept your plan. We must have you to pilot us into Manila harbor; without you, the scheme were impossible. The sultan has decided to join with us. Now, give up this woman and her brother! Give up this madness; glory awaits you, power, wealth, empire!"

Nureddin caught his breath. He saw very clearly what his choice must be. His dream had been a great one, greater than he knew. This Dutchman had seized it, Sultan Ali had seized it; all combined, they could do what no one could do singly, for the Dutch cannon and the Moro swordsmen and the Arab seamen together held Manila at their mercy.

"You offer me a hard choice," said

Nureddin slowly. "My honor is pledged to this woman and her brother."

"I release you from the pledge," said Fatima unexpectedly, and drooped a little. "Hand us over, Nureddin; your honor is clear, you've done all that can be done . . ."

There were murmurs of amazement and approval. But Nureddin gave the girl beside him a glance and a smile, and shook his head.

"You didn't pledge my honor; I did," he said. "Therefore, I'm the one to say on that head, not you. So the choice is mine, not yours." He jerked up his scimitar and thumbed the curved edge, and then looked at the datto of Jolo. "So the choice is mine to make—for peace or war?"

"If you call it such," said the datto with a flash of contempt. "Only a fool would call it a choice, Hazrami, with death at his throat!"

"Very well," said Nureddin. "I choose, by Allah! I choose the best in the world, whether for life or death. Cut, brothers, cut!"

As he spoke, he moved so swiftly that no eye could have warning. His blade flashed up and down. It shore through the two wrists of the datto of Jolo, that leaned on the axe. It flashed again, and the warrior beside the stool dropped across the falling chieftain. In the boat behind, bowstrings twanged and there came a flutter of shafts, and Mansur, the sultan's captain, pitched forward with arrows in his throat.

All this in one instant. As the first alarm yells pealed up, Nureddin hurled himself at the massed ranks. His four men appeared behind him, and Fatima, and Khalid. In the moment before the surprised Moros could use their arms, the Arab scimitars were smiting them

into death, hurling them back, carving a bloody path in the torchlight.

Jans Doort whipped out his blade and struck. It glanced from Nureddin's steel cap. Furious, he struck again, and again the blade glanced. The swarthy hawk-face of Nureddin rose at him with a grin and a word.

"Poor work, infidel, poor work! Hadramaut does better—"

The Toledo blade slashed into the Dutchman's throat; and with that blow, as he well knew, Nureddin bade adieu to all his dreams and ambitions. A Moro with a stabbing spear was upon him from behind, but Fatima's kris cut short the thrust, and this corner of the platform was clear.

NOW befell stern work under the flaring torches. The Moros were stubborn fighters, and the men of Jolo, seeing their datto dying, yelled for vengeance. Steel clashed and men died, but Nureddin was now here, now there, with satanic agility, and every man who faced him fought for a space and died.

His four Arabs fought like himself, and Fatima guarded his back, while young Khalid dyed the glorious kris red that night. Then, by sheer weight, they were pressed back and back upon the boat. One of the Arabs went down under a spear-thrust. Nureddin leaped to his rescue, but a kris had slit his throat. Another Arab slipped in blood and sprawled, and an axe beat out his brains. Nureddin killed the slayer, but a bolo slashed across his thigh and he was down. Shrill and wild pealed the yell, but changed to a death-shriek as he came up and struck, and a Moro died. Another bolo slashed at him, slithered from his mail-shirt, and Khalid struck down this man. But Nureddin's agility was gone now. That slash across the

thigh was draining the life from him, and he knew it.

"Free!" came the yell from the boat. "Quick, *nakoda!*"

Free indeed. The boom was swinging with the current. The boat was moving. Fatima and her brother scrambled in, Nureddin leaped for the stern and made it. One of his Arabs went down under the Moro rush, the other got aboard.

As by magic, the battle and tumult were gone. The boat was heading downstream, the Moro boats dashing for her in vain; most of them were swept aside by the boom as it swung. Three Arabs left, Khalid at an oar with them, and Nureddin with the blood pumping from his thigh, as he sat at the tiller. He caught the girl's hand and dabbled it in the warm blood.

"Tie it up! Stop the blood somehow!" he commanded, and peered out at the water intently, heading the boat over to the farther side.

Away from the town—aye, that was the one chance! Boats crowded there by the wharves and godowns and harbor. Nureddin held over to the farther shore, the oars dipped hard, the current swirled them on. The torches and roaring voices of the town slid past.

"Finished!" exclaimed Fatima, panting. "The best I could do—"

"Good enough," he broke in. A sudden fear had assailed him, at sight of flaring lights far down the river. If they knew he had gone with the girl, then they might well try to occupy the dhow. The mate had moved her, yes; but those lights, those lights! And the flash of powder, the mutter of guns! His crew had muskets, the Moros had none.

The town was past, the massed fleet of praus was past, the two Dutch ships dropped behind. Ahead, under those

torches that shamed the feeble moon, was rising a din of fight; yells, shots, the ringing clash of steel. Nureddin saw that the dhow must have been attacked by surprise, before the mate could get cannon to work or boarding-nets up. Along one side of her showed the dark mass of boats gathered.

The boat was closing down upon her now. Nureddin lifted his head and shouted at his men aboard her. A wild yell made answer; they had heard him.

"Cut the cable! Out with the sweeps! Throw me a rope!" he shouted, and then the boat crashed in among the craft that surrounded the dhow.

From the Moros lifted wild shrieks of dismay and consternation. Luckily, none of the fighting praus were here; only small craft had come. Once at sea, as Nureddin well knew, no Moro vessel could overhaul this big dhow of his.

A last medley of confusion, clashing weapons, wild voices, and they were in under the rail. He was aboard somehow, limping, falling, scrambling up to hurl himself into the fight raging on the deck. The Moros broke and fled. A dying man uprose, bolo in hand, and slashed at Nureddin viciously; the blow missed. Nureddin struck at him, slipped in blood, went all asprawl on the deck—and darkness engulfed him.

WHEN he wakened, the salt sea-air was in his nostrils, the sun was in the east, the dhow was lifting and falling to the sea-swell. Nureddin glanced around. He was lying pillowed on the after-deck, alone. Talking with the old mate, at the tiller, were Fatima and her brother.

Nureddin eyed them. The fine sweep of the young Moro, the lithe body, the alert gaze, pleased him. He was smiling when Fatima turned, saw him lying

on one elbow, and came to him with a rush.

"They've given up! They've turned back!" she cried.

"Who?" demanded Nureddin, as she sank down beside him.

"The praus. The two Dutch ships. They were chasing us, but they've gone!"

Gone, true; gone, and with them dreams and empire and the loot of Manila, and the glory of conquest. And he smiled again, for thought of what he had won instead.

We all sat staring as Templeton came to the end of his story, and his voice died, and the magic of southern seas died with it. We were back in the present again, and the world seemed suddenly drab and empty.

"And you claim that's how history is made?" asked somebody.

"Good lord, man, what more can you ask?" exclaimed Templeton harshly. "A trifle of a man's honor, of a girl's face—think of the tremendous effect it had! Otherwise, Manila would have fallen into Dutch hands, and the whole course of history would have been altered in that part of the world, in other

parts of the world. No Dewey at Manila bay, to mention just one thing. No Manila galleons to be raped and plundered by buccaneers. Spain would have been banished from the south seas, as Portugal was—"

"But what became of this Nureddin? And the girl?" I demanded. "Do you know?"

Templeton gave me a long, slow glance, and looked away, and nodded.

"Yes, I know. A great story, a glorious and glowing story of blood and heroism and empire—good lord!" He glanced at his watch, leaped to his feet, and reached for his hat. "I'm overdue. So long! See you again."

And he was gone, taking his unuttered story with him.

WHAT was this "unuttered story"? What did become of Nureddin the Nakoda? The questions fascinated us, and we put them up to Mr. Bedford-Jones. He, in turn, got after Templeton and the records of the ancient Philippines, and—well, are you interested? If so, let us know, and we'll pursue the matter farther.



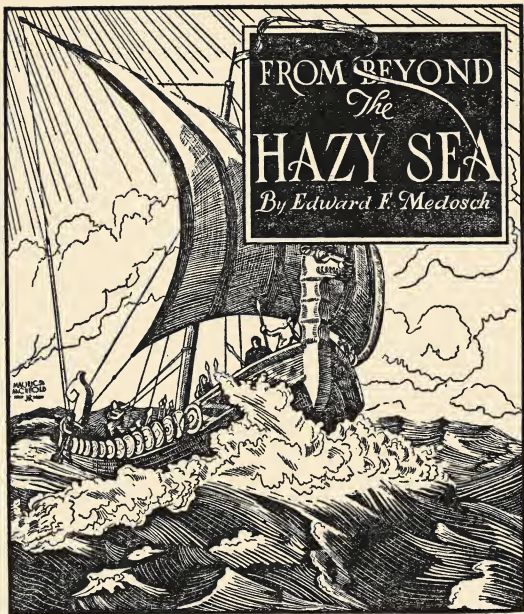
NEXT MONTH

THE QUEEN'S MERCY

By Victor Rousseau

A Rousing Complete Novel of the Reign of "Bloody Mary," when Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey lay in the grim Tower of London.





Illustrated by MAURICE ARCHBOLD, Jr.

WIHTGAR raised the mead-filled cow's-horn mechanically to his lips, while the rough jokes and harsh laughter of his table companions fell on deaf ears. His mind had reverted to his younger brother Eopa, who had been sent that morning as special emissary to the court of King Vortigern. Bold and hardened as he was to a sea-rover's life, the yellow-bearded

Jute ever maintained a weak spot in his heart for Eopa, and while the latter was well able to take care of himself, none knew better than Wihtgar the dangers that beset a stranger in this treacherous land of Britain.

To his left sat Hengest the Here-toch, a towering bulk of barbarous muscle and sinew, who radiated power from the blazing mass of flowing red

hair to his broad-booted feet. At his other side Horsa, the brother of Hengest, kept up a running fire of conversation the while he attacked, with savage gusto, the smoking hot game before him. Around the rough boards a dozen serfs hurried to and fro, replenishing the fast-emptying dishes and bowls of the hungry warriors.

"What thinkest thou of Vortigern's invitation?" Horsa demanded, casting a glance at Hengest.

"'Tis not what I think," he red-bearded giant rumbled. "'Tis deeds that count. He has promised us lands and service so we give him aid in his war with the Picts, who have swarmed south over the Great Wall and have harried him sorely at all points. If he keeps not his promise, I shall deal with him as a true follower of Woden should."

"I have heard that the Briton is treacherous," Wihtgar interposed, coming out of his reverie. "In our previous raids along the coast, I have learned much of the language of the natives and it was told me that this Vortigern had usurped the throne of one Aurelius, the rightful king. The present ruler is nothing more than an Earl of a tribe called the Gewissi."

"Nevertheless, he is the man with whom I have made the bargain," Hengest remarked. "Thy brother, Eopa, as thou knowest, has been sent to Durovernum to tell him of our coming and to await his further wishes. He should be back within the next few hours."

Wihtgar nodded grimly but kept his fears to himself. In stature, he was almost the equal of the Heretoch and save for the golden torque that gleamed upon the latter's forehead, his dress was quite similar to the loricated armor

worn by Hengest. He was, in fact, the leader's right hand man and would have borne the title of "thane" had Hengest affected the dignity of kingship.

A sudden shout went up from one of the Jutes stationed at the edge of camp.

"A stranger approaches on horse-back," he called.

"Send him in," Hengest commanded.

Wihtgar turned half-way around but the Heretoch calmly finished his barley-beer, disdaining to show any curiosity.

AFTER a few moments, the newcomer came in view as he glided through the opening. Broad-shouldered he was, but not very tall, with dark skin, muddy-colored eyes and a face clean-shaven except for long streaming mustaches that hung down either side of his mouth with a walrus-like effect.

He was clad in a tunic of brightly-colored squares of red, green and blue; loose baggy trousers covered his lower limbs, gathered in at the ankles and bound with strips of hide, while a cloak of colored squares, resembling the tunic, was draped about his body with the ends passing through a ring on one shoulder. His head was protected by a long helmet of woven material and around his neck hung a torque of spiral, twisted gold. On his woad-tattooed arms three or four gold bracelets jingled while a gold brooch gleamed at his throat.

The hilt of a bronze knife protruded from his hide belt, and a small spear and an ox-hide shield, ringed round the central boss with studs, completed his accouterments.

"I am come from King Vortigern," he announced, after having been introduced to Hengest. "He bade me inquire

what the strangers from beyond the Hazy Sea mean by settling on his land."

The words were spoken in a language which Hengest could hardly grasp. Wihtgar, however, recognized some of the words as Celtic, but it was a barbarous dialect and not the language he had learned from the Britons on his former raids. He translated, as best he could, the gist of the remarks to his chief.

Hengest bent his heavy brows upon the audacious messenger.

"Hast thy king suddenly lost his mind?" he demanded. "Did he not invite us here to help him fight the Picts?"

Wihtgar was obliged to translate this.

"King Vortigern has changed his mind," the messenger returned. "He fears thou may play him false, know-

ing the disposition of you Saxons, and has commanded me to give thee this!"

At the last word, the envoy made a sudden lunge forward with his spear and would have run Hengest through but for the swift intervention of Wihtgar. Knocking the spear upward with his long iron sword, the Jute fell upon the would-be assassin and wrested his weapon from him.

Hengest sprang from his stool and with his battle-ax would have cloven the head of the messenger but Wihtgar shoved between them.

"Wait!" he said. "We may get some more information from him."

"Out of the way!" Hengest roared. "No man can raise hand against me and live."

But the Jutish warrior did not quail



"So perish all traitors," the Heretoch rumbled.

before the terrible light in the Heretoch's eyes. There was a boldness in the stern lines of his hawk-like face that spoke eloquently of a strain of wild Saxon blood.

"Thou shalt have thy way when I have questioned him," he spoke slowly.

For the space of a few moments the two warriors faced each other, the one filled with savage desire, the other with grim determination. The Jutes had risen from the table to watch the conflict.

Hengest's battle-ax swung downward at the head of his intractable follower when his arm was suddenly caught in the steely grip of Horsa.

"Wait!" the latter admonished. "Wihtgar has a motive."

The red-haired Heretoch growled a fearful imprecation but at his brother's voice, desisted.

"**T**ELL me," Wihtgar turned upon the treacherous native. "Was this Vortigern's command or is it an act of private hatred against us?"

"It was the king's command," the messenger returned sullenly. "He has no use for you foreign invaders. The Picts have been subdued and your services are no longer wanted."

"Didst thou not pass one of our messengers on the road between here and Durovernum?"

"I saw no one."

The Jute eyed him keenly but the Briton lowered his gaze while his fingers quivered about the belt where his knife should have been.

"I do not believe thou art from Vortigern at all," Wihtgar suddenly accused him. "I have heard that the custom of tattooing the body has been given up by the king's followers. Who art thou?"

"I have told thee that I am the king's messenger," the Briton replied doggedly.

Wihtgar turned away to face the Chief.

"Do what thou wilt," he said. "I can get nothing out of this walrus."

With a cry of satisfaction, Hengest lifted his battle-ax. There was no mercy in his barbarous heart. As the terrified Briton turned to flee, the blow fell and he crumpled to the earth with a cloven skull.

"So perish all traitors," the Heretoch rumbled and gave orders to have the body thrown out.

"If Eopa returns not before tomorrow," he continued, "we shall start for Durovernum early in the morning."

Wihtgar turned away to hide the pain that struggled for expression; he knew only too well what Eopa's protracted absence portended.

A babel of voices arose from the five hundred warriors who had followed Hengest to the shores of Britain, each giving his own views, but nearly all firm in the belief that Vortigern intended treachery. Wihtgar and Horsa alone held to the theory that the stranger might have been an impostor and that it would be well to go slowly in the matter.

BUT Eopa did not return. The sun had not yet risen when Hengest gave orders to have two of the three war keels ready, and three hundred of his men were chosen to go with him, Wihtgar among the number. Horsa was bidden to defend the camp with the remaining two hundred.

In the gray dawn the Jutish sea-rovers descended to the long gravel-spit of Ebbsfleet where their three war-keels were beached. Across the great inlet of

sea, almost a mile wide, lay the mainland of Kent. Today it is a river amid a region of marshes, but in the year 449 the Wantsum was a wide sea-channel through which vessels from Gaul made their way to the estuary of the Thames.

The Jutes arrived barely in time to save their boats as the tide was rapidly rising and it was with considerable difficulty that their one remaining vessel was dragged far up the beach out of harm's way. Vortigern's messenger had crossed the channel at noon the day before, when the tide was out, but it would have been impossible now for anyone to cross save in a boat.

Hengest commanded Wihtgar to take charge of one of the vessels while he directed the other. The Jutish war-keel was flat-bottomed, seventy feet long and nine wide, its sides composed of oak boards fastened with bark ropes and iron bolts. The figure of a black dragon arose in a curving line from the bow.

Fifty men in each boat took their places at the oars, leaving a complement of two hundred warriors, fully armed and equipped. The rowers, however, wore no armor of any kind but their shields and weapons lay beside them.

Giving a last look toward the Isle of Thanet, where their camp lay, Wihtgar directed his men to follow Hengest's war-keel up the channel till they reached the mouth of the Stout where they turned. Rowing up this stream was a comparatively simple affair now that the tide was hurrying in.

Some twelve or fourteen miles ahead lay Durovernum, the ancient Roman town upon whose site the rich city of Canterbury rises today. It was here that Vortigern had taken up temporary residence and had sent out special mes-

sengers to the German sea-rovers, during their previous raid upon the coast of Britain, asking their aid against the Picts. It was understood, of course, that Hengest would bring over fresh bands when a distinct agreement was concluded with the British king.

WIHTGAR paid small attention to the hilly country to the north or the gray marsh-levels that stretched southward in the first rays of the morning sun. He felt dimly that there was some grave mistake and that Hengest would do well to make investigation before loosing his hungry band of savage raiders upon the country-side. Should the Jutes begin opening hostilities, Eopa's life would be forfeited, for Wihtgar believed that his brother had been detained at the king's residence until Vortigern's messengers should return. Although stories were rife of the British king's deceitful nature, Wihtgar reasoned that it would not be politic for him to stir up enmity from the seaside when his hands were filled with the barbarians from the north.

Hengest, however, had different ideas. He could be crafty enough when the occasion required, but when his dignity was insulted he laid aside all craft and went straight to the red, raw heart of the matter.

There were few natives along the river and those that were about fled hastily at sight of the terrifying black dragon-prows ascending the stream. Late that morning the men in the foremost boat gave a shout as the great walls of Durovernum came into view. Hengest arose and stared at the sight, his powerful figure looming up like an avenging god in his great iron helmet with its four horns.

Wihtgar gave one look at the massive

walls and turned away disgustedly. The whole enterprise was one huge act of folly.

"What do you propose to do?" he called out. "Storm the walls?"

"If nothing better suffices, yes," Hengest roared back.

The ancient city was nothing more than a little cluster of houses that had grown up among the marshes of the Stour, raised above the morass on a foundation of piles. It stood at a point where the roads from what is now Richborough, Dover and Reculver united to pass by a ford, traversable at low water, on their way to London. Its military importance was marked by the great oval walls about it.

As the Jutes approached, they noted that a vast marsh spread between them and the northeastern side of the city, making a landing impossible. On the northwest, however, the river ran close by and Hengest determined to advance beyond the western end, and thus come around to the south on dry land.

The scene was one of intense beauty and quiet. On the open spaces of the marshes, herons stalked along the edges and flocks of wild fowl swam upon its surface. Here and there a native fisherman made his way along the waterways in a rude coracle, hidden now and then by the rushes that everywhere predominated.

There were a number of men upon the walls as the two war-keels approached and Wihtgar could plainly discern the bows and arrows in their hands as they stood like stone sentinels far above. Every moment the Jutes expected a hail of death from the Britons lined along the battlements and their hands were ready to return it in case the need arose. But no hostile move was made on either side and the

sea-rovers continued their course unmolested.

HENGEST turned about to face his second in command.

"Why do the fools not shoot?" he called back. "They have arrows."

Wihtgar's bold and frosty blue eyes scanned the other for a moment in silence.

"Because they do not expect strife, perhaps," he returned at length.

"Then I shall teach them a lesson," Hengest retorted and gave immediate orders to his men to land beyond the western end of the wall.

The dragon-prowed longships surged in to the shore and grounded with grating keels. Springing from the fore-deck and rowing bench, the Jutes made their way swiftly around to the south, shouting the German battle cry as they spread across the open plain before the city. Upon the bastions, a knot of soldiers gathered with weapons poised.

"Open the gates," Hengest roared, lifting his huge iron sword. "If you refuse, we shall break our way in and take a fearful reckoning."

One of the guards approached the edge of the parapet, with upraised hand.

"Is this the way you come in answer to our friendly offer?" he called down in a strong voice. "What became of our messenger?"

"His corpse is now food for the fish," the Jute returned savagely, "even as you would have robbed my body of life. 'Tis a fair exchange and I have come to take revenge."

He concluded his remarks with a loud command and the entire band of Jutish warriors swept forward toward the gate. But the defenders were ready for them. A great shower of arrows and stones rained down upon the at-

tackers, but the stout shields of the Jutes protected them until they reached the entrance. Here one party began hammering against the gate with their swords and battle-axes while another attempted to protect them with their shields, but the shower of missiles from above became so fierce that they were called back by Hengest.

Already he had lost twenty-five of his men and many were wounded. Wihtgar limped heavily from the effect of a huge rock that had been hurled against his hip. The heavy gate had successfully resisted their onslaught and it would take nothing short of a battering-ram to bring it down.

Wihtgar stormed up to the side of his leader.

"We will lose all our men at that gate," he growled, shaking his long yellow hair that protruded from beneath his helmet. "Ask them to bring Vorti-

Here and there a native fisherman made his way along the waterways in a rude coracle . . .

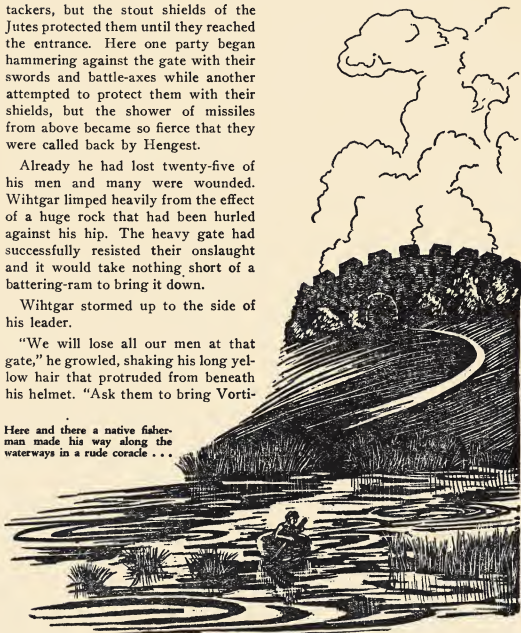
gern hither so we may speak to him. If thou dost not, I will!"

"Much good may it do thee," Hengest retorted. "Call him, if thou wish."

But Vortigern refused to appear. One of the garrison who had made haste to summon him soon returned with the news that the king held Eopa as a

hostage and would slay him upon the spot should the Jutes break down the gates.

Wihtgar clutched his sword with an agonized throb in his breast. There was no alternative. Eopa would be killed for there was no diverting the Heretoch from his purpose once his mind was fixed.



He stared despairingly at the stout barrier, with its supporting bastions, his wits working with feverish haste. There must be a way to circumvent this ghastly farce.

Hengest was making ready to renew the attack for he was a man who would never submit to defeat. As he faced Wihtgar to give the order, the latter limped forward, holding up his hand. The idea had come.

In a few terse sentences the Jutish warrior delivered his suggestions while the Heretoch stood in skeptical silence, waiting for him to finish. The concluding words of Wihtgar, however, caused him to change his attitude and he slowly, but reluctantly, gave his consent.

TURNING toward his men, Hengest roared a command. With a wild shout some three-score Jutes once more dashed after their leader toward the gate. Their repulse was furious in the extreme. So deadly was the hail of missiles from the walls that Hengest was forced to retreat. Even as he did so, something struck him in the back. Staggering a few steps, he stumbled and fell. Most of his men had made their way in confusion toward the marshes while Wihtgar and his followers withdrew toward the southwest.

As the great leader fell, two of his men picked him up and followed the line of retreat toward the marshes. A great shout went up from the walls as the Jutes withdrew. There came a sudden rasping noise at the entrance, the great oak gate swung open and a horde of yelling, triumphant Britons charged out after the fallen Heretoch and his men.

Wihtgar slowed down his followers. The time had come to test out his theory. Wheeling back toward the en-

trance, he came upon the rear of the Britons who had already fallen upon the Jutes retreating toward the marshes. A fearful havoc ensued.

Hengest's contingent came to an unexpected halt at the edge of the morass, turned about at the Heretoch's command and presented a solid front of interlocked war-shields. Hengest's sham injury had served its purpose, although the stone had been real enough. The Britons received a sudden check.

Slowly but steadily the shield-wall began pressing the natives backward, while Wihtgar skillfully maneuvered his men to allow the defeated Britons a passage back to the gate. Numbers were slain as the great battle-axes of the Jutes beat down the weaker weapons of their opponents so that, despite their numbers, the Britons were forced to retreat to safety.

As they neared the walls, the heavy gate swung open to receive them, but before it could be reclosed, Wihtgar and his men had forced their way in behind the fugitives, gaining the inside of the city before the barrier could be closed. He had but one objective now; nothing else mattered.

LIKE an angry wave the Jutish warriors surged up the main street of Durovernum, the defenders falling back in consternation, uncertain whether to treat these barbarians with placating civility or to throw their lives away in a vain attempt to stem their onrush. Catching one of the Britons, Wihtgar demanded to know the whereabouts of the King and was directed, in a frightened voice, toward an edifice at the end of the thoroughfare.

As the Jutes reached their goal, Wihtgar scanned the house before him with eager interest. It was an old

Roman building, one story high, and built with two projecting wings, the whole forming three sides of an open paved court. The walls were of small red brick, barred with courses of yellow tile, the whole sheltered by a red-tiled roof.

As he stood, deciding what to do, a double row of British soldiers came forth, blocking the way.

"Where is Eopa, my brother?" he called out in the Celtic tongue.

"He comes now," one of the soldiers replied.

Through the central archway of the front entrance, Wihtgar beheld two men come forward. The one to the right he instantly recognized as his brother. The other was a stranger but there was no doubt in Wihtgar's mind as to his identity.

A medium-sized figure who bore himself with regal mien, albeit he had usurped his kingly power through treacherous cunning; such was Vortigern as the Jute beheld him. The ambitious cupidity of the man was plainly evident in the ravening light of his amber eyes and the clutching motion of his jewel-ringed fingers when they should have been at rest.

He was clad in a russet-brown tunic, reaching to the knee, flecked with gold; white stockings and light hide shoes with an intricate pattern pierced in the uppers were upon his feet. A belt of gold with a jeweled clasp supported a short Roman sword and a magnificent brooch sparkled at the throat of his tunic.

"Your Majesty!" Wihtgar spoke in a deep voice. "There have been grievous mistakes all around and it may be we are in the wrong. I have come to offer myself in the place of my brother, who stands by your side."

"What is the meaning of all this bloodshed?" Vortigern demanded coldly. "Did I not invite Hengest and his men here in peace?"

"That may be true," Wihtgar retorted, "but the messenger whom thou hadst sent to our camp attempted to slay Hengest, saying he did so upon thy orders. In the end Hengest slew him."

"By my orders?" the king echoed in astonishment. "That is a lie. What did this messenger look like?"

Briefly Wihtgar gave him a description of the man.

"Tattooed with woad, did you say?" his listener exclaimed. "Sisillius, my messenger, had no such adornment. If thou speakest truth, then some half-wild native waylaid my man, killed him and adorned himself in his clothes. But why?"

At that moment a wild shouting fell upon their ears and Wihtgar turned to see Hengest at the head of his warriors coming up the avenue. The blow he had received from the stone had not had any serious effect.

VORTIGERN drew his sword and pressed the point against Eopa's breast.

"Tell thy wild German," he announced firmly, "that as the first man sets foot in this court, I shall slay this fellow who stands beside me."

Wihtgar threw himself upon his knees before Vortigern.

"Spare him!" he cried in anguish. "Gladly do I offer myself in his stead. He is innocent. Surely, it can make no difference to thee."

"Nay, brother," Eopa stepped forward. "Do not humble yourself before this Briton. I can die as well as thee."

Vortigern appeared to consider, then

suddenly pushed Eopa from him and addressed Wihtgar one more.

"Stand up! Thy brother is free, but thou takest his place."

Eopa sped to the edge of the court, calling to Hengest to desist, while Wihtgar smiled grimly. His object had been accomplished, but he knew that not even for him would Hengest defer his vengeance.

The Heretoch faced the British king with wrathful bearing, as he thundered:

"Release my man this instant or I shall slay thee here and now!"

"If thou dost not recall thy men immediately," Vortigern returned coolly, "I shall assuredly plunge this sword into the barbarian beside me."

"Ye both are playing at cross-purposes," Wihtgar spoke. "The villain who attacked thee, Hengest, was not sent by King Vortigern at all. Someone is trying to stir up enmity between us for his own ends."

The red-bearded giant fingered his great sword, unconvinced.

"When I have definite proof of it," he rumbled, "I shall withdraw, but I believe the rat is cornered and is trying to lie himself out."

"Very well!" Vortigern laughed scornfully. "Thou shalt be the loser. There are enough fighting men here at my call to avenge my death right royally."

As he spoke he raised the point of his sword toward his self-appointed hostage, who took one step backward, determined to sell his life as dearly as possible. At the same moment the Heretoch waved his great weapon in the air and gave the well-known Saxon war-cry.

Wihtgar's hand fell to his side and

the red tide of slaughter poised precariously on the next move when a great shout went up from both Jutes and Britons as a wild figure dashed in from a side street and threw himself, exhausted, upon his knees before Vortigern. He was clad in wolf-skins and carried a hunting knife at his girdle.

"Sisillius!" the king exclaimed in astonishment. "What means this?"

"It means treachery," the newcomer returned in a strained voice. "Some of the Picts, who had come much farther south than ever before, must have learned of thy invitation to these Jutes and hoping to stir up enmity between thee and thy allies, waylaid me while on my way to Hengest's camp yesterday. They clubbed me to the ground and thinking I was dead, one of them stripped me of my clothes and threw his own wolf-skins down beside me. When I came to I donned his dress and made my way back on foot but I was so weak I had to stay all night at a charcoal-burner's hut. This morning I set out and only just learned of the fighting between the Jutes and our own men."

There was a gasp of relief from the tensed multitude and Vortigern boldly slid his sword back into its sheath, as he gazed at his foe.

"Wilt thou believe me now?" he spoke. "My intentions have been friendly from the start but thou hast forced me to fight."

Hengest grumbled something in his beard, sheathing his blade as he did so.

"I have been in the wrong," he finally said, shame-faced as any school-boy. "I shall indemnify thee for thy loss."

Wihtgar threw one heavy arm over his brother's shoulders and withdrew from the gaze of both King and Heretoch.



"But Laga, it is the will of Marl that our children should die."

by PANSY E. BLACK

Illustrated by JAY JACKSON

GRAAH, the young chief of the tree people, faced his promised mate, Laga, across the cairn of stone, pitifully small in the fading light. Behind them was the river of warm water, and the great trees with their houses of bark

and twigs. Beyond these the ground rose sharply to a natural amphitheatre opening into the fire house of the great god, Kryl.

Both Graah and Laga were dressed only in shoulder fur and loin cloth, but

neither heeded the keen wind. He stared at her downbent head, a dull ache in his heart. Presently she raised her eyes to his face. "He died," she said, "my sister's babe, though I piled robes over him and held him against my flesh. We were to mate in the spring, Graah, but I tell you I'll see no child of mine suffer and die as did this one."

"But Laga, it is the will of Marl that our children should die. It has been so since the beginning." Then he realized the uselessness of speech as she knelt to place another stone on the tiny grave, and gathering her robe about her, moved off toward the trees.

The young chieftain sighed. All matings of the tribe were at seed time, and though the fruits of earth were safely gathered before Marl, the Snow God, began his reign the children did not come for three long months, when the tree huts were cold by day and freezing at night. It had been so since the first ancestor built his hut in the trees to be safe from beasts. Only the priest of Kryl and his people dared have dwellings on the earth, but they were favored of the god. Now Laga had sworn an oath and either he must find a way to save the children or go mateless to his grave. After a moment he too descended the hill.

The narrow deep river came apparently from the bowels of the fire mountain, but the water though always warm was always fresh. Graah wondered why, since Kryl so favored them, he permitted Marl to kill so many in the snows and the chill. However, it was only a passing thought for he must find game for the evening meal, first providing for his own mother, who was very old and whose hands were so crippled she could not feed herself.

Then he would lead his men in attack on the big elk that had drunk unmolested for three nights at the warm water.

Scarcely had he left the shelter of the trees when a small, wild horse crossed his path and he pursued it swiftly, hoping to force it away from the House of Fire, since none might follow game there. But it doubled back, dashed across the amphitheatre and disappeared in the entrance. Panting, the chief leaned on his spear and let the grateful warmth beat on his chilled body, watching the huge pillar of flame soaring upward inside Kryl's hut.

At length he turned away, thoughtfully, and that night as he held his mother in his arms, piling upon her all the robes except enough to keep life in his body, and knew in spite of them that she was dying and at length a corpse, he made a mighty resolve.

THE pale chariot of Kryl was hardly above the horizon when Graah knocked at the hut of Aya. This was a frail structure of stones and tree branches, its door a flimsy barrier any beast could break, and many did, but never to the harm of the priest. Now as the chief pounded at the door, he wondered for the hundredth time how Aya, sleeping on the cold bosom of the earth, could live so long and feel the cold so little. He drew his fur closer about his shoulders as a particularly sharp breeze blew it over his head, then glanced down as the priest opened the door, obviously in a vile temper at being awakened so early.

He snarled. "Enter, enter. Marl loves not the servants of Kryl. In," and as the chief obeyed, closed the door, dropping over it a curtain of rough

skins, which shook in the blasts of wind.

"What would Graah with Kryl?" he asked, eyeing the chief in the faint light filtering through the stones. "'Tis full early."

"First, the woman who bore me died in the night," then as the priest moved toward a mourning mask on the wall, "but there will be no fast today. My people have suffered enough since Kryl's chariot made its last round. They feast now on the elk we slew, and tomorrow, if Marl wills, they fast."

Amazement showed on Aya's face. "You would defy the god? Kryl has ordained fasts for the dead."

"And well enough in his reign, but there is no need the tribe should starve as well as freeze. None need know of the death till the morrow, since it was not possible for her who bore me to move from her hut, and I have a petition to make to the great god, Kryl, if indeed he be a god."

"If thou hast doubts, forget to appoint his messenger, and see if he enters his chariot more," suggested the priest.

Graah didn't seem to hear. "Make prayer to Kryl as thou dost know how," he said, "that I be allowed to bring the tribe to the entrance of his abode and there stay till he again enters his chariot to warm the earth. Else will they all perish, for it is only the beginning of the reign of Marl and many are already dead."

Aya made a derisive gesture. "You would have them live on the earth where wild beasts can snatch the children and pull down the women and the old ones?" he asked.

"My warriors would guard them, and a few lost at the mouth of the beast were better than the wail of perishing babes."

He was staring over the priest's head so did not see his expression as he asked, "Since when have warriors mourned for babes? They have always passed to Marl—"

"And shall no more," abruptly. "Make thou my petition to the god."

"And the winter messenger?" asked Aya.

"Can wait the god's answer to my prayer." Leaving the door ajar he strode off down the path to the stream where the women were gathering water for the day. Laga had filled her pot when Graah came up behind her.

"I have joined battle with Kryl for my people," he told her. "Either I perish or no more babes wail themselves away into darkness. Kryl is no god or he tires of his people and would see them destroyed without pity. If that be so I worship him no more."

Alarm welled in her eyes as she whispered, "You are mad, Graah, Kryl will smite you with plague. See, he gives us warm water to drink and harvests in their season."

"And allows Marl to strike us down as we raise them to our lips. I have made prayer to the god. If he grant it not, we perish, and he is no god, but a monster devouring those who worship him."

ANOTHER day and night passed while the chief waited the answer to his prayer, then the priest sought him as he watched the mothers of five babes carry tiny stiffened corpses to the hillside. "The god will answer thee, if thou wilt come to the entrance of his hut," he told Graah, "and may the answer be to thy liking."

The chief stared at him. "The tribe will hear the answer," he said. "We will come when Kryl's chariot touches

the top of yonder peak," which meant that hour between fasting for the dead and feasting for the living.

"Kryl would answer thee alone," snarled Aya.

"I wish the tribe to hear." After studying the chief's face a moment, the priest shambled off toward the mountain, muttering to himself.

That night they gathered in a twilight filled with the snarling of hungry beasts, and with the warriors flanking them, marched into the arena before the House of Fire. There were pitifully few babes or old people among them. Marl had taken rich toll since the chariot of Kryl grew cold.

At length all were within the circle, close to the mouth of the cave, the warmth beating gratefully on their chilled bodies; the warriors guarding the rear. As they waited Aya and his son Makyl appeared on rocks either side the entrance bearing in their hands great pots of fire, the very life of Kryl himself, its brilliance driving back the lurking beasts.

Setting the pots on pinnacles of rock, the priests turning to the opening in the hill, made due adoration and invocation as the people swayed to their knees, Graah only remaining on his feet. Both as chieftain and petitioner his place was before the face of Kryl.

The fire played on his motionless form, on the fur cloak blowing about his shoulders, on the dark hair held in place with a fillet of hammered metal; and the petition to Kryl echoed hollowly among the crags and wakened weird responses in the windy night.

When any made petition to the god his prayer was either refused or granted without any quibble. There was no room for half interpretations or comment of his priests. If granted, the fiery

pillar showed no change, but if denied this visible presence of the god would bend forward till it filled the opening; roaring as it came.

Now the voices of the priests died, the fire in the pots faded into darkness; the wind blew keen among the rocks, the howling beasts came near and the people shivered. In the cave the fire pillar soared serenely upward as was its wont, and for an instant Graah dared hope; then came the great roaring and the bending of the pillar and he knew the petition denied.

As his tribe rose slowly and prepared to go back to their homes to die, their chief seemed to go mad. Throwing up his arms imperatively he cried, "So thou hast refused my petition, Kryl, thou cruel monster, who would see thy people die. Thou art no god, but a demon."

He was interrupted. Aya stood in front of him, horror on his face. "Cease," he cried. "Knowest thou the fate of him who speaks against Kryl?"

A peculiar smile crossed the chief's face. "Yea, I know. And before you pronounce my doom, priest, I will offer myself. Behold the midwinter messenger."

THE winter sacrifice was always made when the god's chariot passed on its lowest track to the south and its warmth was least. It had been instituted ages before in a spring when the chariot rose higher each day but brought no warmth, and it was obvious the god was not in it. The trees leaved late, the grass scarce grew at all, the people could find no game, nor plant crops, and nearly all died from eating that which perished of starvation and the lizards dug from the mud of the stream.

The high priest had told them Kryl left his chariot in winter to retire to his hut in the fire mountain and that year of starvation he had forgotten to return, so hereafter one of the tribe must be sent to him each year to remind him of their need.

Heretofore only an old, useless warrior had gone, never a young man and certainly not a chief. No person except the family of the high priest and the messenger had ever entered the house of Kryl, so none knew what state he kept or how the messenger went to him; but one thing was known, none had ever returned. The ceremony was to be at high noon, when the rays of the pale chariot struck full into the opening in the mountain.



"Kryl, thou cruel monster . . . Thou are no god, but a demon."

Arrayed in all his panoply of feather headdress, superb bearskin robe, sandals of horsehide and his weapons, Graah stood before the tribe and made due obeisance to the god, but in his heart was great bitterness. He meant when he reached Kryl's abode not only to remind him to return, but also to denounce him in bitterest terms for his refusal to protect his people.

The chant of farewell rose from the tribe, and Graah thought of his dream of the night before. His dead mother had seemed to stand beside him in the House of Fire. He was naked as the ritual prescribed, but she was in a heavy robe of skin. Taking a knife from her belt she hid it in his long hair, whispering, "Do this at the hour of sacrifice," and vanished.

And so vivid had been that dream that, though it was against all the rites of the god, for none might enter his house armed, he now had a small, but very sharp weapon hidden under his headdress. Presently the chant ceased and Aya and his son appeared in the opening.

Striding to Graah's side, the priests removed his garments and weapons, laying them behind him to signify that he was done with them forever, then one on either side, led him into the House of Fire.

TEN minutes later he looked about curiously. He was bound to a pillar of blackened stone on the brink of the column of fire, lightly bound, because he had bunched his huge muscles when the rope was tied, some vague remembrance of his dream that he could not clearly recall, prompting him.

The rocky floor sloped away in every direction save one, from the pillar and

it was difficult to see beyond the flame which roared in front, but he could see, and understood many things. Aya and his son dwelt here in the cavern of the god, their resting place the ledges on the sides; rich skins formed their couch, and at one side was a kraal where neighed a herd of tiny horses. No wonder the priests did not fear Marl and his blasts.

But where were they? As soon as he had been safely fastened to the pillar old Aya mocked him. "When you are taken to Kryl I shall rule the tribe through my son. He will take Laga whether she will or not. As for you, we will not give you of the wine of forgetfulness as we have those who went before you, lest they feel Kryl's embrace too much. But get you to the god and contest him in full vigor."

A blast of flame very near cut through Graah's thoughts and he saw the pillar bending toward him. It would not be long now before he was face to face with Kryl. Then as the flame wavered he saw beyond it to the further side of the cave where Aya and his son were pushing on a great rock from behind which came a fierce blast of wind directing the breath of Kryl toward his messenger.

Graah felt surge within him the will to remain on earth, and for a while he forgot his mission. Pulling against his bonds, he pressed his hands, bound in front of him, upward toward his head.

The flame swayed nearer and he realized Aya was playing with him. A smell of burning hair filled the cavern, as some of his long tresses scorched, but he only bunched his muscles harder, and the rope yielded as the tips of his fingers touched the knife.

The pillar moved away from him and he could have sworn Aya laughed, but

he sawed through the ropes on his wrists and, as he saw the pillar approaching, he crouched down so that when it actually touched the top of the column some eighteen feet above him he only felt uncomfortably warm. A moment later he was free, free to seek his enemy though he be the chosen of Kryl.

Not daring to stand upright in the betraying light, he rolled behind the pillar, crawled to the foot of the descent, then stood upright against the wall of the first ledge.

But Makyl had sighted him and even as the pillar bent to embrace the entire stone, he snatched a knife from his belt and threw it. It had to pass through the column of fire to reach Graah and fell short, clattering at his feet. Now the chief was doubly armed and almost mechanically thanked Kryl, forgetting his quarrel with him.

Seeing he had failed, Makyl left his post at the rocking stone and started for the lower end of the cave, determined to make an end of the chief. At the same time Aya loosed his clutch on the rock, which sank back to its place, and the flame rose once more.

GRAAH glanced about the cavern swiftly. Where he stood was its lowest slope. At his right and half way to the rock at the further end was the kraal of the ponies. From the kraal, some twenty feet higher than where he stood, the floor sloped directly into the column of flame, with only a narrow ledge between the slope and the kraal. A narrow outcrop or spur ran along the top of the slope from the pillar of sacrifice to the ledge.

The chief was trapped if he stayed where he was, since Aya could come at him from the left as Makyl ap-

proached along the ledge, unless he could force a fight in front of the kraal. The younger priest was already half way to the spot and Graah had to climb the slope as well as make half the distance his rival had already come. But he did not hesitate. Springing up the incline, a knife in either hand he gained the top and rushed along the ledge just as Makyl reached the kraal.

Graah had the advantage of being armed, but Makyl knew the footing better, for almost as they met, the chief tripped on an unseen spur and nearly rolled down the slope. He had just recovered his balance when the priest snatched up a rock and flung it at his head. He avoided it easily but out of the corner of his eye saw Aya coming along the spur toward them.

The momentary distraction gave Makyl his chance and he gripped the naked man round the waist, pinioning his left arm and seizing his right in a powerful clutch. The sweat stood out on Graah's body, unused as he was to the heat, but his muscles had been hardened by long hours on the hunt and gradually he broke Makyl's grip. The priest struggled desperately to regain it, then slipped on the narrow ledge as Graah's knife drove home into his throat. With a choking cry he tottered, and pitching backward head first, disappeared into the column of flame.

Graah had no time to rejoice over his victory. Aya, halfway across the rocky spur, had, when his son plunged to death, thrown a short spear which grazed the chief's arm drawing blood and, as he started for the high priest, another whizzed past his head, to clatter into the kraal. Then drawing a broad knife from his belt and calling on Kryl to avenge his servant, Aya waited for him.

The chief did not falter. To pass Aya on that narrow spur was impossible; to challenge him to grips else-



With a choking cry he tottered, and pitching backward, disappeared into the column of flame.

where in the cavern was folly, Aya knew he had the advantage where he stood. He had on sandals; the spur was covered with needlelike points. Moreover his back was to the fire and while every movement of the chief's was visible, he himself would be only a blur against the flame to Graah's dazzled vision.

The chief's first move out on the spur drove a rock needle through the tough outer sole of his foot, but instead of pausing, he broke into a run, every step marked with blood; his aspect so ferocious that almost involuntarily the priest gave ground, though he swung his knife before him in an attempt to cut him down. Graah dropped to a swift crouch so the weapon whistled over his head; then he was up and on his enemy, striking for the throat as he had with Makyl, but the high priest was wary. He swayed out of reach, drawing Graah off his balance and almost precipitating both of them down the slope. In the scuffle the chief's knife dropped from his hand and in a glittering arc vanished into the flame.

Then, unarmed, Graah jumped Aya, bearing him downward upon the jagged needles of the spur, driving blow after blow to his chin and head. There was no chance for Aya to use his sword; in fact, it was now a hindrance, and neither knew when it dropped away from the contest.

Each was now bent on throwing the other to the fire column so near at hand. Once Graah completely lost his balance, and only his desperate clutch on the tiger skin the priest wore saved him, as Aya battered at his fingers, attempting to loosen them.

Then the chief was back on top. Gaining a clutch on his enemy's head he drove it down upon the spur. There

was a gusty sigh and Aya went limp beneath him. One of the needles which the priest had counted on as his allies had gone through his skull and the fight was over.

SLOWLY Graah gained his feet and stood staring down at the priest. Then almost without thought, he dragged from the corpse the tigerskin which was sacred to the service of Kryl, thus disturbing the balance of the body which rolled down the slope and disappeared. He was alone in the House of Fire.

Fearfully he looked at the pillar. Would the god speedily fill the cavern with flame and destroy the intruder and avenge his servants? But the fire only soared upward serenely, with its customary soft hissing. Otherwise the cavern was very still.

Then an almost inaudible sound broke on the chief's tense listening and he whirled. Standing on the narrow ledge in front of the kraal was a bent, white haired man, dressed in one of the sacred leopard skins. Scenting a new foe, Graah rushed toward him, to stop abruptly as the other threw up both hands, "Greeting, son of Lahk," a feeble voice said, "do you not know me?"

"Gatn, my mother's brother," in amazement. "I thought you long with Kryl."

"Nay. Aya always kept one of us to tend the breath of Kryl," pointing to the rock at the further end of the cave. "When we grew too old to serve he sent us to the god. I was to have been the sacrifice this year, had you not offered."

Graah shouted with joy. "Gatn, my mother's brother, the god hath spared us to take the place of these others. Had it been otherwise he would have stayed their plunge. Now are we his priests chosen of him, and I proclaim it his will that we dwell within his House when Marl rules the earth." As he spoke he wrapped about him the sacred leopard skin and followed by Gatn, strode from the Place of Fire.

NEXT seedtime when Kryl had remounted his chariot, Graah mated with Laga and at the very hour when he had been offered as messenger to the god a year before, he stood beside her on a ledge within the House of Fire. Outside the fierce winds howled and snow drove across the amphitheatre, but within on a bed of furs Laga suckled his first born son.

COMING IN APRIL GOLDEN FLEECE

SWORDS AND MONGOLS

By Murray Leinster

Love and Adventure on the Top of the World

☆

OCTAVE 75

By Vincent Cornier

An Unforgettable Story by the Author of "The Mantle That Laughed"

COVER BY M. BRUNDAGE

PIONEERS OF THE POSTS

by WILLIAM TIBBETTS BRANNON

ONE of the earliest heroes of American history was an unnamed young man who stood beside his horse one chill morning in January of 1693 solemnly listening to instructions from Francis Lovelace, Governor of New York (lately New Amsterdam). Among other things, Lovelace ordered him to "detect and cause to bee apprehended all Souldyers and Servants runn away from these parts." He swore that he would "truly and soberly comport yorselfe," that he would guard his cargo with his life.

Then the Governor handed the young rider a portmanteau full of letters for Boston. The young man mounted his horse and rode out through the woods of Manhattan, the cheers of more than two thousand people ringing in his ears. He was not only the first official postman in America; he was the first to ride down "Heroes' Highway" in New York.

The route to Boston then was practically an uncharted course. He must brave all the perils of the wilderness and savage, possibly hostile Indians. Snow and ice and unbridged streams made the trip all the more hazardous. Following the trail was a matter of guesswork; there were some rudely beaten paths through the wilderness, some dim Indian trails, nothing else.

Thus, with little more than a horse and a young man's fortitude, was the first official mail service in America launched. Many others were to follow his example. The pages of America's postal history are replete with stories of bravery and daring in carrying the mails.

NEARLY a century later, another man gained wide repute as a messenger. The posts, by that time fairly well organized, were a monopoly of the British crown, by royal edict. But the rebellious Americans needed a courier service free from British snooping. The man who began to ride with the swiftness and elusiveness of the wind was in large part responsible for the quick cementing of the colonies in a bond of revolt against the crown.

His name was Paul Revere.

Though Paul Revere is noted in the history books for his performance after the outbreak of the war, his real service came before. He carried secret messages between patriots before open warfare was considered. His most valuable service was in 1775, when he carried a message from Boston to the Committee of Fifty in New York, proposing a boycott of English goods. Revere rode on to Philadelphia with the message and returned to New York.

The Committee of Fifty had decided to act. Revere was informed of the action, and began scattering the news far and wide to secret committees in the various colonies. The patriots responded to the call and the Continental Congress came into being.

Then, one quiet Sunday, late in April, the customary peace of Manhattan was broken by the galloping horse of the postrider, Israel Bessel. Breathlessly, he related the startling news: The patriots had battled the British at Lexington. The war was on. American independence was at stake!

The British post was doomed and collapsed completely on May 4. The

American postriders took up where they left off with hardly an interruption. Without the daring riders and some equally daring postmasters, the story of the war might have been different.

Riding through wilderness and over unblazed trails was perilous enough. But more hazardous still were the stealthy trips between the Continental Congress and the armies in the field. An American soldier captured by the British was treated as a prisoner of war; but a postrider bearing secret messages was treated as a traitor and was likely to be executed for treason.

Yet these unsung heroes of the Revolution permitted no such hazard to stop them. They rode by night around the enemy lines or crept stealthily through the brush virtually under the noses of British generals. It was only through their efforts that news of the war was carried from colony to colony and some sort of co-ordination maintained.

They also carried private communications, greatly aided by the most successful whispering campaign in American history. Even though the British occupied a town, the American post office was still maintained and its whereabouts known to most Americans. The Postmaster at New York greatly annoyed the British when they occupied the town. Not only did he keep the post office going, but almost daily printed and distributed handbills attacking the Tories.

The post office was as mobile as a present-day trailer, being moved at any moment from one house to another. But when a move was made, word was always left for those patriots "inquiring where the Postmaster might be heard of." Finally, when the enemy's occupancy of New York became too com-

plete, the Postmaster and appurtenances retreated through Westchester County with Washington's army.

IT WAS not until after the war that the value of the postrider's service received recognition. But soon he came to be a great man and the day of his arrival in a village was known, not as Tuesday or Friday, but as "post day." The citizens met the postman, who stood in the center of the throng and called out the names of those for whom he had letters or newspapers. When he had delivered his mail, prominent men vied with each other for the honor of putting up the postman overnight. The winner was considered a very lucky fellow when he proudly escorted the postrider home with him. A feast was placed before him and the family proudly gathered around while he told the news and related whatever adventures had befallen him on the way.

The incredible expansion of the vast and vague territory known as the West called for innovations in the postal service. Mail was sent into the wilds by stages, horseback riders, boats, afoot. It was carried all the way from Pittsburgh to Cincinnati in a canoe. One boat was scheduled to leave "every Monday Morning at Five O'clock or the night before if she chuses."

The new Louisiana Territory demanded attention. Arrangements were made to run a line to New Orleans, down the river from Natchez. A treaty with the Cherokees permitted routes to the settlements on the Tombigbee and Mobile Rivers. The Indians cleared the trails, provided log bridges across streams. They also agreed to furnish food and entertainment for the postrider and feed his horse.

An unhappy mistake on the New Orleans route was almost serious. The battle of New Orleans was fought two weeks after a treaty of peace had been signed in Belgium, but the news was slow getting to Washington. Immediately, a special postrider was dispatched with a message from the War Department.

With the help of a special order from the Postmaster-General the postrider sped on his way. He arrived at New Orleans in record time, dashed breathlessly up to General Jackson and presented the pouch. When it was opened, nothing more than a private letter was disclosed. The wrong letter had been put in the pouch! It was only after the rider had shown Jackson the special order from the Postmaster-General that the story of the peace treaty was accepted as truth.

A FAVORITE controversy of the early part of the Nineteenth Century was whether or not mail should be carried on Sunday. Many people protested against it, but the postmen continued to ride. A group of ardent gentlemen in Princeton, New Jersey, decided to take matters in their own hands.

One Sunday morning they gathered at an advantageous place on the road. When the Washington mail messenger came galloping along, he was forcibly detained and held until Monday morning. The pious plotters were arrested and punished and their agitation ceased. When the pouch was opened, it was found to contain, outside of a few dead letters and official reports, several copies of the *Christian Advocate*.

Over in Michigan, a young man was

given the tough assignment of riding with the mails to the new post office at Grand Rapids. He blazed a trail by marking trees with a hatchet, forded creeks and swam rivers. On one occasion, while his horse was swimming a river, the pouch got loose and went swirling downstream. The boy swam after it, recovered it, went on his way.

Coming to a clearing, he could hear the agonized cries of a woman. He located a cabin and went in, finding the woman in labor. Her husband had gone for a doctor, but that was seven miles away and he was afoot. At the direction of the woman, the boy boiled water and made other preparations. After the baby was born and the woman made comfortable, the postrider continued his journey. On his return trip, he was hailed at the clearing by a man who said he was the father. They were so grateful they had decided to name the baby "Mail Boy."

The disappearance of the western frontiers and technological advances soon made the work of the postmen routine matters rather than feats. The service came to be taken for granted. The mailman was just another lucky stiff with a regular job. If the mail didn't come through, the Department was to blame.

The general attitude was expressed by the Postmaster in a small town in Georgia, who wrote in response to Washington's insistent demands for his quarterly reports, then long overdue:

"...you need send no further communications to me concerning those reports, as I don't intend to waste my time on anything of the kind or send any dam reports to Washington until I get through cutting my hay."

The Round Table



AN OPEN FORUM FOR OUR READERS

A young reader from St. Louis writes:

"I wish to congratulate you on your magazine **GOLDEN FLEECE**. Its stories of adventure and history are among the best I've ever read. I have just finished reading your January issue and I believe that the main story 'Eric of Aztalan' by Ralph Milne Farley is an outstanding story of the early days in the exploration of our country. It is filled with the kind of action a fellow of my age really enjoys. I am a senior in high school. Give us more stories of this kind and we'll surely be satisfied readers."

Bill Maxwell.

A lot of other people think "Eric of Aztalan" a splendid story. Indeed, the Milwaukee Journal gave almost half a page of the Green Sheet to a writeup of "Eric." Unfortunately, in condensing Mr. Farley's foot-notes to the story we seem to have given some of our readers the impression that small free bulletins were available at the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee. Since "Copper: Its Mining and Use by the Aborigines of the Lake Superior Region," by George A. West, covers 185 pages, and "Ancient Aztalan" is a book of 602 pages, of which two hundred are illustrations, free distribution is, of course, impossible.

James E. Dodd of Beardmore, Ont., while dynamiting on a mining claim nearby, recently uncovered a grave containing a broken sword, the handgrip of a shield and a battle ax, which have been identified as Norse weapons of about 1000 A.D., says the Journal in another story. This adds one more link to the long chain of evidence that Columbus didn't discover America.

Victor C. Ferkiss of South Ozone Park, N. Y., writes two letters this time:

"The idea of illustrations on the inside of the front cover is a good one. The cover itself (December) was swell. . . . 'The White Rogue' by Anthony Rud was the best story of the issue—more like this.

How anyone can mutilate their copies of **GOLDEN FLEECE** by tearing their covers off and pasting them in scrapbooks is more than I can understand. I save mine whole and file them away."

"The January issue was a humdinger. You've improved unbelievably since the first issues.

Illustrations get better and better.

How about a few lively disputes like the science fiction mags used to have?

Nix on swap column, personally I think it waste of space; if enough readers want it let them have it though.

How about departments on the following, in pictures maybe:

(1) Minute Biographies of Historical Figures.

(2) Little Known Incidents in History."

Mr. Ferkiss thinks "Eric of Aztalan" a bell-ringer, and wants more prehistorics like "The Hairless Ones Come," also like "Peace on the Sea," of "virtually unknown events and peoples."

"I want to second the motion made by Mr. Gerald W. Meader, of Rumford, Maine (January issue). A column for people collecting back issues of magazines would be very helpful and we readers would appreciate the help it would give us. So I would like to cast my vote in favor of Mr. Meader's idea.

Best of luck to GOLDEN FLEECE."
Hughes Robertson, Salisbury, Md.

"Once again I tread before the portals of your domain to voice my pleasure after reading the January issue of GOLDEN FLEECE. You are certainly keeping it historically adventurous—and that is a treat.

Delay's cover was excellent—far better than some pen and ink work he has done. The story 'Eric of Aztalan' was right up my alley—being a profound admirer of the Vikings. The hardy Norsemen—robbers and fighters they may have been—but the vision of those tall, fair-haired people makes my pulses stir. This Eric gave me plenty fighting in one story. . . .

'Twas a treat to read a tale from the magnificent pen of Robert E. Howard. This 'Gates of Empire' was a grand adventure, even more entertaining because of the glib tongue of the lovable rogue, Giles Hobson."

Gertrude Hemken, Chicago, Ill.

"Congratulations on one of the most interesting magazines on the market. Did I hear mention of a tale of Genghis Khan?" says Frank Kelly of Crystal Beach, Ont.

Not yet, Mr. Kelly, but since the editors have similar leanings, we wouldn't be surprised to find him around some time. One of the best novels we ever read was about the rise of Genghis Khan. You will enjoy "Swords and Mongols" by Murray Leinster, coming next month.

"By chance, while reading through your February issue I came across the story 'Ariadne Speaks' by Clyde B. Clason, and was delighted to find that quite evidently the historical researches of Clason's Theocritus Lucius Westborough have more than fictional standing. (Westborough is the central character of Clason's several excellent detective stories published by Crime Club, as you undoubtedly know.) I am pleased at finding some of Mr. Clason's work outside the detective novel field where his talent for research, so evident in the novels, can be given freer rein. I am eagerly waiting for further adventure of the beautiful Ariadne."

J. H. Carmody, Chicago, Ill.

"I am usually too lazy to write to magazine editors to praise their fine stories, taking the best they have without a word of appreciation to them. But I write in the present case to urge you to print more from Mr. Clason's pen. He should continue Ariadne's story where it leaves off in this one."

Eldson C. Smith, Chicago, Ill.

H. T. Hill of Los Angeles expresses similar sentiments as does Clare I. Hutchins of Chicago, who also likes "the imagination with which he treats that old legend."

Mr. Clason himself says:

"It was a joy and delight to see the clever treatment you gave to 'ARIADNE SPEAKS.' Please convey my indebtedness to Maurice Archbold, Jr., for his gorgeous illustrations. These are not only things of beauty in themselves, but Mr. Archbold has caught the spirit of the period with rare fidelity of detail."

We ourselves are proud of bringing "Ariadne" to life again so vividly. Watch for "The Bath of King Minos."

"Stick to the Historical Adventure—there are plenty and more of other kinds of fiction on the stands now—mostly detective stories, cowboy yarns and similar trash.

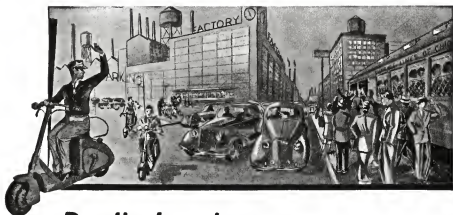
Lastly, please remind your writers that our own early history furnished plenty of adventure and romance, unless our school books and Fenimore Cooper were awful liars."

Iring Miner, Cornell, Ill.

The modern historian says our school books were awful liars about many things, but one of our acquaintance says that there is a wealth of true adventure in our old records that has barely been touched. We wonder if any of our readers have missed the many fine historical novels so popular today?

And, by the way, if you don't believe in coincidence why did Harold Delay and Maurice Archbold, Jr., both choose to illustrate the little round boats of ancient times this month? And remember the hoes, hoes, hoes, in February?

In response to many inquiries: Yes, back numbers of GOLDEN FLEECE are still available at 20 cents each from October, 1938, on, but orders are steadily increasing, so if you want to complete your file do it quickly before our stock is exhausted.



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